

City Hall, Monroe, Louisiana
December 23, 2024
5:00p.m.

The Honorable Chairman Juanita G. Woods, called the meeting to order. She then asked the clerk to call roll.

There were present: Mrs. Ezernack, Ms. Woods, Mr. McFarland, & Mr. Muhammad

There was absent: Mr. Harvey

Chairman Woods announced that a quorum was present, and that the Invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance would be led by Mayor Ellis or his designee.

The Invocation was led by Bishop Rodney McFarland.

Ms. Woods thanked everyone for being at the City Council meeting. She said it is that time of the year where everybody has the hustle and bustle. She said Christmas is in the air and she thanked everyone for coming out for the last City Council meeting for 2024.

COMMUNICATIONS & SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS:

(1) Mrs. Ezernack said good evening and thanked everyone for being at the Council meeting. She said she knows it is a busy time for everyone, and we always need to remember the reason for the season. She stated the sad event she attended last week for Sheriff Gary Gilley of Richland Parish who happen to be her husband's first cousin. She noted the respect at that particular event there were probably about 2000 people for the visitation and the service itself. She further noted he was an outstanding man, father, brother, and son. She said he will certainly be missed by Richland Parish and his family. She said for everyone to keep his family in their prayers, and she knows they need it at this particular time as well. She said there are others that are suffering right now in the hospital or having issues, so they need to remember them as well at this time of the year.

(2) Mr. McFarland echoed the sentiments of Mrs. Ezernack, and he said again they pray for the family. He said he has a business in Richland Parish and one of his employees is also a deputy sheriff there under him. He said this past week there were so many deaths within the City of those that have worked with them over the years, and they want to remember to keep those families in prayer. He noted last Monday he was able to unveil four book boxes, and it was well attended by the students of the schools. He said although some didn't quite understand the donation, or didn't want to emphasize that it is being sponsored by the Council. He said they always keep the children first. Lastly, he wished everybody a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. He said he pray and hope everyone be safe and always remember that Jesus is the reason for the season.

(3) Mr. Muhammad wished everyone a Happy Holiday season and prosperous New Year for 2025. He said he was blessed to go to two events, first event was the Black Chamber of Commerce, and he thanked Ms. Kenya Roberson for his award. He said the second event was on Saturday and the Town of Richwood celebrated 50 years as a township. He stated he attended a toy drive today put on by Mr. Tyrone Goodin at the Burg Jones Lanes Learning Center that was well attended by the children. He said Ms. Marie Brown also had a successful toy drive as well. He further stated as a community they all pulled together to make sure that the children at least get a toy.

(4) Mayor Friday Ellis said good evening to everyone and Merry Christmas. He shared his sentiments to Sheriff Gilley's family and Mr. Richard Moore and his family going through a time of lost in the City. He said today marks 16 years that his father passed and even though it is sad day for him it's a reminder every day is a gift and tomorrow is not promised. He thanked the first responders and crews that are working when we all get to be at home with our family. He noted there were some great events throughout the City and so many things happening for the community to come together. He announced City offices would be closed during the Holidays and dates would be on the City's website. He gave an update for Atakapa, and he further noted the water bill Congresswoman Julia Letlow put \$7 million into was signed and put into effect today. On another note, he announced the 46th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Salute on January 15, 2025, at 10 am. He stated it has been a pleasure to be able to serve in this capacity as Mayor. He said he is proud of everyone, and he is looking forward to the great work ahead in 2025.

(5) Ms. Woods expressed her condolences to the Sheriff of Richland Parish and the many families who have lost loved ones. She said if you know someone definitely keep those families lifted in prayer because it is a hard time of the year to lose loved ones, not that it's not hard always. She thanked the food bank in collaboration with Ms. Gayle Benson, Owner of the Saints and the Pelicans. She noted Ms. Benson came to Monroe on last week to visit Shelling Elementary and blessed all the children with a gift card. She said the food bank gave them all bags of sweet potatoes and it was a marvelous event. She further noted Ms. Brown had over 600 children at Powell Street Recreation Center on Saturday for the toy drive. She thanked Ms. Brown for all that she does in the community and being a part of the Council staff. On another note, she said she had her meet and greet on Thursday of last week and it was phenomenal. She said it was an opportunity once again with the people in District three to hear them talk and know what was on their minds. She said there is breaking news that the Mayor of our city has been appointed by Governor Jeff Landry to the Southern Rail Commission. She said this is huge for the City to have a vote on the board and our Mayor be a part of it. She thanked Mayor Ellis, and she said she knows the Mayor will serve us well. She thanked the Northeast Black Chamber of Commerce who had their annual event on last week and they gave plaques to the Council that will be in the Council Chambers.

Upon motion of Mr. McFarland and seconded by Mr. Muhammad, and the minutes of the Legal and Regular session of December 10, 2024, were unanimously approved. (There were no public comments.)

PRESENTATIONS:

FISCAL YEAR AUDIT PRESENTATION:

Allen, Green, & Williams, LLP – Certified Public Accountants:

Mr. Tim Green, CPA Partner, stated he has met with each of the leadership and kind of went over the report and he would do a quick summary of it. He said the most important thing is the financial compliance audit in the City and they issued a clean opinion. He said the opinion issued on the financial statements are fairly stated and there's no adjustment needed. He said in the past year in the general fund the City had an increase in fund balance of \$111,000 and consistently had a little bit of increase in the fund balance in the last several years. He said he thinks the fund balance is in the \$15 million category which is a nice reserve for the City of Monroe. He further stated as far as federal programs they tested the last of the Coronavirus State and Local fiscal recovery funds. He said the Covid money is now kind of gone away and the City had a lot of good uses for that, and the infrastructure bill is there and hopefully the City will receive some funding. He said there were three Capital Project funds the Kansas Lane Connector, Kansas Lane extension, and the Texas/Standifer Trunk repair all ended the year with a negative fund balance which means they were overspent. He said it's all kind of in anticipation of getting some State and Federal grants and it is his understanding the City is still on track to receive that funding. He noted as soon as that funding comes in those balances will go back to the positive. He further noted the City has used a good bit of the Capital Infrastructure fund for various purposes and that showed a decrease this year. He said at one time the City was sitting at 17 or 18 million dollars in that fund and it has decreased down to \$7 million. He said the Capital Infrastructure money is to be used for Capital Infrastructure and for expenditures and spending the money from taxpayers perspective is a good thing.

Ms. Jennie Henry, CPA Audit Manager, stated they have to do a compliance testing for federal funds and the expenditures covered for the City by federal funds this year was a total of \$32.5 million. She said last year it was only \$22 million and the largest portion of that was the highway planning and construction which made up \$16.4 million and \$13.7 million of it was Kansas Lane Connector. She said the second biggest was the rescue plan money at \$10.5 million. She noted they tested the State Local fiscal recovery funds and there were no problems with the compliance with that federal program. She said the first finding this year was the internal control over fuel cards and it was a finding last year. She said there are many fuel cards that the City use for their vehicles, and they found last year there were a couple of names of people that were no longer employed with the City that were on the statements. She said it has improved this year, but they couldn't consider it cleared because when testing they found statements were not being reviewed by the supervisors in a timely manner. She said the second finding the internal controls over the Civic Center contracts, and she said they asked for twenty-five Civic Center contracts, and they only received nine that were signed and in place for the event. She said either sixteen could not be

presented to them or didn't have signatures at the time of the event. She further noted that it needs to be worked on to make sure it is being charged correctly and for legal requirements. She said the third one was compliance with the water revenue bond covenant and according to the water revenue bond covenant for the series 2018 there's a reserve ratio that has that has to be maintained. She said it is a reserved ratio of 125% and this year it only met 105%.

Mr. Green noted the last finding 202402 in reference to kind of the timekeeping records and time in the Police Department. He said there were 3 or 4 things they were concerned about and one being the time clock systems in the police department that were being used in the fall of last year. He said that system was changed by the City to new time clock system, but the time clocks didn't get replaced in the Police Department. He said he thinks they were looking at maybe doing something different. He said when the time clocks were in place during the first part of the fiscal year that they audited they determined that for the administrative staff are the only ones kind of on the time clock system. He said the policeman and so forth have a different method that they're using to kind of keep up with their time. He said they had situations where the time clocks were being punched, and those hours were not reconciled to the hours that were being paid. He said a time clock from an auditor standpoint is very accurate information. He said even though the staff were punching the time clock they were not using that to be paid from and there needed to be justification as to why they weren't using the time clock. He said he thinks there is effort at this point to get the new time clock system in place in the Police Department so that it could be reestablished as far as them punching the time clocks. He stated thirdly the holidays per the union contract he think if they work a holiday in the Police Department you basically get three times your pay. He said they get paid double for working that day and an extra day they can take off later. He said the issue they had was it wouldn't be necessary for administrative staff to be working on a holiday.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know if that is in their contract to get paid like that and who wrote the contract.

Mr. Brandon Creekbaum, City Attorney, noted that it is the negotiated Union contract that is approved by the Council.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know when the contract comes back up.

Mr. Creekbaum stated 2028.

Mr. McFarland said to him that it doesn't make good sense to have a contract like that for somebody to get paid three times. He wanted to know if the former Council was aware of the language in the contract.

Mr. Creekbaum said that particular language has been in place he thinks for multiple contracts, and this is not something that was a new addition to the contract that was approved earlier this year. He said the audit findings are something that they are going to be reviewing for any contract negotiations anytime an issues arises, and it is on the list to be addressed.

Mr. McFarland wanted clarification that nobody caught that when this particular contract was written. He said there are people coming in just to come in to receive three day pay and he wanted to know if they are trying to put a stop to it. He said is the City just letting it flow because it was an oversight in the former City Council.

Mr. Creekbaum stated there have been Union contracts with the Police Department for a very long time and to be clear this is not three days' worth of payment. He said this a benefit that is tacked on to a small subset of people and there is an administrative staff as a whole of the Police Department is a smaller subset.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know if they are classified.

Mr. Creekbaum noted some of them are and some are not but there are different rules. He said this is the problem when you have a union contract that applies globally to many different types of employees. He said some are classified as administrative staff and some staff not working on the street at police officer capacity.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know if they had to wait until 2028 to do some amending.

Mr. Creekbaum stated if there would be amendments to the contract it would have to be mutually negotiated, and Police Department would have to be willing too.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know who wrote the contract.

Mr. Creekbaum said he doesn't know when it made into the contract and there have been multiple versions over the years and that was not one of the provisions that was negotiated in this contract.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know if this is the first year the auditor is finding this, and he wanted to know if they were the auditor's last year.

Mr. Green stated they rotate different things that they do, and they did not specifically look at the Police Department this past year. He said they looked at the Police Department probably three years ago and at that time there were no time clocks in the Police Department. He said three or four years when they were auditing they were concerned about it, and the Police Department agreed to put time clocks in their department as it relates to the administrative staff. He said they were pleased with that, and they thought it had been working fine but when they went in to test the hours that administrative staff were punching time clocks but were not using that to be paid by.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know if it was the entire staff.

Mr. Green said no, he said he thinks the administrative staff is about 30 people or so.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know if the Police Department is slow at getting on board with the new time clock.

Mrs. Stacy Rowell, Director of Administration, said yes sir, and she believe at the time there is a little misunderstanding between the City ordering the time clocks. She said there is a mechanism where they can clock in from a computer, and it was her understanding that they were going to be doing that for this group. She said they also have a scheduling software designed for patrol and they felt like that was sufficient.

Mr. Muhammad stated he think it's important that the Police Department become in sync with what's required. He said for them not to have a finding such as this and his concern why it isn't in place.

Mrs. Rowell stated that is being addressed and she said working holidays as soon as that was brought to Chief Zordan attention he immediately quelled that basically he will only bring in absolutely essential staff.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know how long this has been going on those that need not be at work coming in work to get three days. He wanted to know if they went back to do research on that.

Mrs. Rowell said no sir.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know why not.

Mrs. Rowell stated as far as she is aware they were at that liberty of being able to choose whether they came to work or not.

Mr. McFarland said they are going to have better oversight, and this is problematic with him. He said he is floored about who wrote the contract, who didn't caught this, why is it being caught now, and how many years this has been going on.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know if the City Attorney negotiate for the City contracts.

Mr. Creekbaum said he was involved with the most recent contract, and he wasn't involved in contracts before that. He said again that's not a provision that was looked at in this most recent contract he suspect. He said they will do whatever research they need to do to figure how long that provision has been in the contract. He said he suspect that there was a general policy adopted that was intended to apply to police officers as a unit and then it had a spillover effect to other types of staff that maybe weren't fully addressed. He said how it happen and when it happened are questions he doesn't know the answer too.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know Mr. Green's recommendation to fix it.

Mr. Green said his recommendation is to maybe look at the policy of the City and see if that could be changed on the policy. He said sometimes the policies are set up for the department as a whole and then there may be situations where that kind is not applied properly. He noted, for example, the Police Department he thinks through State Statute that they can have up to 365 days of sick leave in a year.

Mr. Creekbaum stated that it is State law.

Mr. Green said it gives the Police Department an incentive not to take sick leave if during a quarter they don't take any sick leave they can get 12 extra hours of vacation leave. He said if they retire they can't get paid for any of that sick leave. He said the administrative staff in the Police Department kind of follow those same rules except that they are also eligible for the City's policy which says that at the end of their term they can be paid for sick leave. He said that it needs to be addressed in the employee manual.

Mr. Creekbaum stated there's no doubt there's favorable benefits to the administrative staff and the Police Department whether that came in through just focusing on getting officers on the streets and benefits that are available to them, and they had spillover effect that is his suspicion. He said these are all things through the bargaining process either in the next contract or during other circumstances that may come up between now and the expiration of this one, if there are other occasions to look at those issues are things he has in his list of items that should be addressed.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know how long this contract has been in place.

Mr. Creekbaum said he believes March of this year.

Mr. McFarland wanted clarification that it was approved by the former Council.

Mr. Creekbaum said that is correct.

Ms. Woods wanted to know if Chief is acting on just this being applicable to the essential employees and doing something different for the administrative staff.

Mrs. Rowell stated the ones from the administrative staff that had been coming in it is her understanding he will now only allow whatever is absolutely necessary.

Chief Mary Tellis, Assistant Chief of Police, said yes, the administrative staff no longer work on holidays and the only time they can work on a holidays is if the Chief approves it. She said the only people that do not take off are patrol, radio room, and booking.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know when was this brought to their attention.

Chief Tellis said she isn't sure when it was brought to their attention and whenever the report came out it was quickly addressed.

Chief Victor Zordan, Chief of Police, said he never heard of the contract either and some Police Department don't have Unions, but Monroe Police Department has a Union. He said Unions are governed by Union President and contracts. He said this is the second contract he is involved in, and he said they went through negotiating the contract with former City Attorney Angie Sturdivant and former Assistant Chief Don Bartley. He said they sat down with the Union President, Vice President, and the Treasurer and there where whole host of things. He noted in this contract they had incentives built and in essence it's triple pay, but they get overtime pay for that day and ability to take another day off. He said the administrative staff would be clerks, secretary, payroll, and there were about 15 people that took advantage of that and they already said they not doing that anymore since Mr. Green had the audit. He said everyone in the Police Department is in the Union and everybody under the collective bargaining agreement pretty much get the same benefits depending on what hours they work.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know if it was 30 employees that took advantage of this?

Chief Zordan said he thinks about 18 to 20.

Mr. Creekbaum said there are a lot of incentives provisions built in and other type of incentives that built into this contract. He said historically some of these incentives came about the City wasn't in a position to provide pay raises to officers or to provide other ways to entice people to

come or remain with the City of Monroe. He said some of the incentives that have made their way into this contract that have been longstanding were done in lieu of pay raises.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know if the issue with the time clock has been resolved.

Chief Zordan said the time clock were installed probably a week after the audit and everyone is using them like they suppose too.

Chief Tellis said 365 may seem like a lot, but she has been sick a lot this past year. She said when they are on sick log you have to call out and the supervisors go out and check the officers and personnels who are on sick leave. She said they say it's not 365, it's 364 because if you are not back by 365 your job is in jeopardy. She said if they are out for that long they have to do a fit for duty.

Chief Zordan noted the negotiations are a give and get. He said they had auxiliary he believe for people that have worked 10 to 15 years they set caps and limits on floating holidays. He said they had auxiliary time they could build up to 300 hours and if they didn't use it they could be paid for it when they retire. He said that was one of the things the City wanted to get rid of because it's a burden and the negotiation process they came up the floating holiday because they couldn't get paid for it. He said they would maybe get a little more from the auxiliary for money made as a corporal and retire as a major off the books. He said they make a base salary of 33,000 a year and they are trying to incentivize and be competitive with the Sheriff's office, Alexandria PD, and Morehouse and it's just one of the things they do to make it a good place to work.

Mrs. Ezernack said that they all need to remember it's a negotiation and they don't know what they gave up to get this, or agreed to get this, or whatever. She said it's not just sit down at a table and in one day they work it out and from her experience it's a long process. She said she knows some of the other departments as far as like on call hours call out minimums are in some of those other contracts as well. She said to clear it all up the Council is not involved in any of those negotiations whatsoever.

Mr. Creekbaum stated Council's involvement is to ratify the contract and they do have a role in process.

Mr. McFarland noted it is the responsibility of the Council to read.

Ms. Woods wanted clarification if Mr. Creekbaum said the City is not in a position to give the police a raise.

Mr. Creekbaum said no, he stated in previous years.

Ms. Woods stated when they couldn't they had other things in place to incentivize.

Mr. Creekbaum said that is correct, and if he remembers correctly in the 2011 contract one of those contracts around then he thinks the police wanted a pay raise and the City wasn't in a position to give an across the board pay raise. He said they negotiated some of the incentives.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know if the Police Department get a raise every year.

Chief Zordan noted they get a 2% raise every year off their base salary and they did get a raise in 2021 which got their base up to competitive. He said they get something called a 25th check which is a sales tax check.

Ms. Woods stated Mr. Green named several finding at the Police Department and she wanted him to explain the them punching the clock.

Mr. Green stated that it is where they are punching the clocks, and they need to reconcile that time with what they are actually getting paid during a period of time. He said there was no reconciliation, and they were using other methods to determine the amount of pay for those employees.

Mr. McFarland stated they wanted to go back to the Civic Center contract.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know what was the reason they didn't get all the contracts.

Ms. Henry said some weren't on file and some weren't signed but she doesn't have a breakdown of the ones not signed as of now.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know which internal controls what they would suggest they do at the Civic Center.

Ms. Henry said whoever is the new civic center manager need to review contracts before the event and review after the event to be sure whatever they charged equals the contract.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know what is the danger of that.

Ms. Henry said for them not to be overcharged or undercharged. She said someone could get injured or something could go missing.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know why they didn't ask for more contracts to see if they could produce them.

Ms. Henry said they asked for contracts numerous times so if they're going to provide those then they don't increase their sample.

Mr. McFarland stated there are probably many more not signed and he wanted to know if they looked into the payment on these contracts.

Ms. Henry noted they looked at the payment on those contracts and there were no issue with the payment meeting the contract.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know about the unsigned contract.

Ms. Henry said if they had the contract then they paid that amount and if they didn't have a contract at all they couldn't verify.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know if they had issues of nonpayment.

Ms. Henry said there are some outstanding receivables.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know how long.

Ms. Henry said she isn't sure about the date.

Mr. Green stated management was looking at those and trying to get them collected but there were some unpaid.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know the dollar amount.

Mr. Green said he isn't sure they would need to look back at their records.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know how soon they can provide that information and if he can get it to the Council by next Monday.

Mr. Green said absolutely.

Mr. McFarland said he would love to know in the last 12 months how many unpaid contracts at the Civic Center.

Mrs. Rowell stated the report is showing 60,000, which she wouldn't consider a large amount.

Mr. Green said that would probably be a good indication of it. He said they think if you have a contract in place that can eliminate a lot of questions that may rise at a later date. He said if they don't have a contract in place he guess they just make up the invoice at the end saying here's what it is that can lead to a possibly to some disputes or whatever.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know how many individuals do they deal with at the Civic Center about the contract.

Mr. Green said the person who was working with him isn't here tonight, but it seem she was working with a couple of people.

WATER FUND REPORT & RATE RECOMMENDATION:

Mrs. Stacy Rowell, Director of Administration, said according to the most recent ordinance the Council passed she is to provide a report on the conditions of the water fund, any outstanding debt, and any covenants that are tied to the water revenues. In the packet provided to the Council on the first page is the statement of revenues, expenses, and changes in the fund net position which is basically a balance sheet. She said the first is the cash equivalents for about 8.1 million and some restricted cash that the City can't touch because it has to do with bond reserves etc. She said the current assets sit at 15.1 million and the non-current assets, which is basically capital assets net of depreciation the City is looking at about 72 million. She said the current liabilities are at about 7 and half million those are the operating payables. She said then there are the non-current liabilities which include compensated absences leases with revenue bond of 32.6 million of an outstanding amount at this time. She said basically the net position at the end of the year is 42.4 million and of that 35.4 is tied basically to assets. She said moving on to the income statement the operating revenues for fiscal year ended April 30, 2024, is 13 million and operating expenses of about 12.3 million which leaves an operating income of \$710,000. She noted total non-operating revenues or expense of \$987,000 that includes the gain or loss on any sales of assets, interest income, and any interest expense they paid toward those bonds and debt. She said at the end of that is the income loss before capital contributions and transfers which gives a \$277,000 net loss. She said the capital contributions 17 and half million that have to do with any transfers of assets that were paid outside of the system. Lastly, she stated is the covenant for the bonds that was shared with Council in separate meetings. She said this part is about having to cover that debt basically 1.25 of each year's payment.

Ms. Woods stated the City were at 1.05.

On another note, moving on to the administration recommendation, Mrs. Rowell stated the last five years rate increases in 2020 the City had a 0.03% increase. She said that was the CPI and the increase that was implemented which was a 2 cent increase. She said the CPI in 2021 was 4% and the City used the 4% which was a 17 cent increase in 2022. She said in 2022 this was a CPI of 8.3% and it was capped according to the ordinance at 4% which was 17%. She said 2023 the actual CPI was 4.9% and they capped again according to the ordinance at 4% with an 18 cent increase. She noted the most recent 2024 was put in place in May and it was a 3.4% CPI with a 14 cent increase. She said for the last five years the cumulative effect has been a 68 cent increase to water. She said looking at the 2025 year they will always be looking to be a little bit behind being that they get their audit report in October, and they have gone through half a year rates already. She stated the CPI that is ran through November the unadjusted 12 month ended November 2024 it's sitting at 2.7% right now which is their recommendation at this time. She said that it is a 13 cent increase to water that equates to a new rate of \$4.79 per thousand gallons. She said her request is they form some type of working committee with herself, Mr. Sean Benton, Mr. Simmons, and whomever they choose from the Council and look at some possible rate structuring changes as opposed to just everyone paying that same rate across the board. She said high quotes have to do with their meter size and the required minimum that the City make them pay. She said there are some things she feels they can do that might take some or every increase off of the residents.

Ms. Woods wanted to know if Mrs. Rowell is recommending the Council consider the 13 cent increase for across the board.

Mrs. Rowell said yes ma'am, and this is something according to the ordinance the Council would have to be introduce. She said the Council doesn't act on it and it goes into effect in 30 days and the cap is at 4% even in the new ordinance.

Mr. McFarland wanted clarification that if the Council don't act on it will be automatic.

Mr. Creekbaum stated that it is what is in the most recent ordinance that Mrs. Rowell delivers the administration recommendation by December 31st. He said if the Council doesn't act on that recommendation within 30 days it becomes effective automatically.

Mr. McFarland stated the Council need to go on record if they are going to act on it but not today.

Mrs. Rowell wanted to know what if the Council don't want to do any rate increase.

Mr. Creekbaum stated it would be an ordinance rejecting the recommendation.

Mrs. Rowell stated by ordinance or resolution the Council can reject the recommendation and leave things the same.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know how the City can get to 1.25 for the covenant.

Mrs. Rowell noted this is the first year the City dropped from 1.25 and they would have to go back and recalculate.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to clarify Mrs. Rowell wanted to put together a committee to explore some possibilities.

Mrs. Rowell said yes.

Ms. Woods said that it is something the Council can entertain after the holiday.

Mrs. Rowell said yes.

Ms. Woods noted there's no action required on the recommendation.

RESOLUTIONS AND MINUTE ENTRIES:

1. Council

(a) Upon motion of Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8863 approving a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement with Power Tools For At Risk Youth and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Ms. Woods stated she has 2 book boxes in her district and the children are really benefiting from it. She thanked them for their response time, and she said one did get vandalized in Mr. Muhammad's district and they replaced and replenished it immediately.

Mr. Robert Jordan thanked the Council for partnering with them and he said they have gotten great reviews. He said he think this is beneficial and they have had several calls about saving an eleven year old's life who was suicidal. He said they received calls from principles saying students reading scores were starting to improve, and they do know this is an effective method.

2. Department of Administration

(a) Upon motion of Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved to Consider eleven (11) Renewal Applications for a New 2025 Class A Alcoholic Beverage Permit. The Monroe Police Department has no disqualifying records and Sales Tax has been approved. (There were public comments.)

(b) Upon motion of Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved to Consider four (4) Renewal Applications for a New 2025 Class B Alcoholic Beverage Permit. The Monroe Police Department has no disqualifying records and Sales Tax has been approved. (There were public comments.)

(c) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved to Consider four (4) Renewal Applications for a New 2025 Class B Alcoholic Beverage Permit. The Monroe Police Department has no disqualifying records and Sales Tax has been approved. (There were public comments.)

(d) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack, seconded by McFarland and unanimously approved to Consider four (4) Renewal Applications for a New 2025 Class B Alcoholic Beverage Permit. The Monroe Police Department has no disqualifying records and Sales Tax has been approved.

Ms. Emily, Owner of the Trove, said they are looking to follow through with the last step of their license to be able to have a boutique, wine, and spirit shop at the Trove gift store.

(e) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8864 authorizing the renewal purchase of Artic Wolf Managed Cybersecurity Licenses and Software and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Department of Planning & Urban Development:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8865 approving a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement with the Louisiana

Department of Health and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Mayor's Office:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8866 approving a Memorandum of Understanding by and between the City of Monroe and St. John the Baptist Parish and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(b) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8867 approving a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement to seek Raise Grant Program Funding for passenger rail terminals and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Mr. Muhammad thanked the Mayor for being appointed to the commission and he hope to see Amtrack become a reality in Monroe.

Mr. McFarland noted he can't wait until they get some movement on this and he said he pray and hope they can get some serious movement during their tenure.

Mayor Ellis stated DOTD has moved 10 million into a bucket of funds and the federal Rail Administration has now deemed Atlanta to Dallas the long distance route which means it will be federally supported rather than State supported. He said as far as State goes it's good for the State they don't have to come out of the operating budget to help Amtrack stand the City up. He said the City is using the State dollars braided in with our dollars to draw down more federal dollars and this will help the City construct the stations. He said the State and Federal government will be giving the City the green light to build stations and he said hopefully the City will have some favorable outcomes on the application. He said with all things attached to federal now it's all about what the federal government does with the funding. He said the State as far as they're concerned are writing letters of support.

Police Department:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8868 approving a Subrecipient Agreement between the City of Monroe and the Ouachita Parish Police Jury for the Senior Citizen Initiative Unit and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Chief Tellis thanked the City Council for everything they did during the time of the Senior Citizens Police Academy, and they couldn't have done it without the Council, the Mayor, and Chief Zordan. She thanked the Ouachita Parish Police Jury for giving them the money to continue with the program, but it would not have been done without Police Juror Lonnie Hudson.

Ms. Woods wanted to know how much many they are donating to the program.

Chief Tellis noted they are donating \$20,000 to the program.

Mr. McFarland thanked Mr. Lonnie Hudson and the Police Jury for helping and he said he is also one of his deacons.

Ms. Woods stated this is such a worthwhile program and she really appreciated them very much.

INTRODUCTION OF RESOLUTION & ORDINANCES:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved to Introduce an Ordinance Establishing Comprehensive Violent Crime Victims' Rights and a Notification System for the City of Monroe and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(b) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved to Introduce an Ordinance renaming East Street to Coach Ray Gambino Way and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Mr. Muhammad thanked Coach Ray Gambino, and he said he wasn't able to make it tonight. He said the alumni at Wossman High School are very supportive of this idea and they wanted to name a street after Coach Gambino. He said he thinks he will be appreciative of it.

Citizen's Participation:

(1) Ms. Kenya Roberson, Black Chamber of Commerce, thanked the Council for being in attendance at their first State of the Chamber of 2024. She said it was very well attended and thanked the City of Monroe workers that set up. She said they really were attentive and helpful.. She noted the theme for 2025 is collaborations and more partnerships. She said she is looking forward to more of that with the City as well as the Mayor and the Council. She said she thinks that with collaboration with everyone and to be inclusive is the way to go.

(2.) Ms. Terry Love, 2913 Barrington Drive, thanked the City for the Chat & Chew and she said it gave her an opportunity to learn something, but she also have some concerns. She said she lives in Foster Heights and there are too many shootings, drugs, and things going on. She said there are open sewage lines that are not being addressed and when she tried to address them they tried to evict her, so she got a lawyer. She said she is asking the Council to please help the residents of federal housing places because the people who are hired are not doing their job.

Ms. Woods thanked Ms. Love, and she stated for clarification purpose the Monroe City Council basically have no jurisdiction over the housing authority. She said Foster Heights is in her district, and she will start having a conversation with them regarding these issues. She said they would speak with the Mayor and Chief Zordan to see what other mechanisms can be put in place minimize some of the shooting in the area.

Ms. Love said they don't want her at the front office because she will address the issue and as a resident there they need help. She said she will call HUD, and she wanted the Council to know what is going on in her area. She said as a poll commissioner she does her part.

Ms. Woods thanked Ms. Love for coming to her Chat & Chew and she came to the meeting.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know if the open sewer falls under the City.

Mr. Creekbaum stated if it's the maintenance line it depends on if it's on private property or public right away. He said he is sure they let Mr. James know because he has been outside of other apartment complexes that have had open sewer issues. He said it becomes a little difficult because of Monroe Housing Authority is the owner of the property and there's a little less enforcement power over political subdivision for lack of a better term.

McFarland wanted to know if that problem has been addressed.

Ms. Love said no sir, she have pictures, and she will continue to take pictures. She said another issue is why are they evicting single moms. She said a lot of this stuff is mental health and they evicted her neighbor, and she needed help not to be evicted.

There being no objection from the Council Mr. Muhammad recognized the new NAACP President Cliff Thomas.

Ms. Woods wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from the City Council. There being no further business to come before the council, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 6:42 p.m.

Ms. Juanita G. Woods
Chairman

Ms. Carolus S. Riley
Council Clerk

Ms. Ileana Murray
Staff Secretary

For extended details on the council meeting please call the Council Clerk Monday-Friday at 318-329-2252 to schedule an appointment to listen to the minute recording.