

City Hall, Monroe, Louisiana
September 10, 2024
6:00p.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 Mr. Muhammad or his designee.

The Invocation was led by Pastor Kelvin Horne of True Vine Baptist Church (Youth Pastor)

COMMUNICATIONS & SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS:

(1.) Mrs. Ezernack said good evening to everyone and thanked them for being at the Council meeting. She said with the possibility of the storm remember our State and the City. She said if you have someone to check on make sure they're safe during this time and pray for the people in South Louisiana.

(2.) Mr. McFarland echoed Mrs. Ezernack comments concerning those in the pathway of the storm and he said let us continue to pray with them and for them. He said to make sure they can assist them and do whatever they can as a City. He noted on Thursday his third Chat & Chew will be at the Lighthouse Church, 513 Sunnyside Street Monroe, La. He invited all to the Chat & Chew to talk about things going on or they would like to see happen in the district. He further noted the Omega Fraternity will have their sixth annual Prostate Glow Walk and Run on Saturday, September 14th from 6pm until 10pm at the Downtown River market, 316 South Grand Street. He said individuals are \$20 and teams are \$150 to enter the walk, and this is for a great cause. On another note, he said to keep the Brantly family in prayer, and he said Dr. Phedra Brantley who was once the principal at Carver Elementary passed away on last week.

(3.) Mr. Muhammad echoed the sentiments of the Council, and he said keep everyone in prayer for safe passage with the storm coming our way. He announced the Sickle Cell Anemia Banquet Thursday at the Civic Center. He said the Community clean-up partnered with Ouachita Green, Kappa Alpha Si Fraternity, and OIC of Ouachita Parish planned for Saturday September 21st and they will convene at the safety center and clean up 165 South from 1-20 down to Winnsboro Road. On another note, he stated the Community meeting will be a walking community meeting talking to the residents of Bryant's Addition about their concerns Thursday September 19th.

(4.) Mayor Ellis echoed the sentiments of the Council for South Louisiana as they prepare for the storm and all the emergency disaster folks mobilizing to head South. He noted the City celebrated something very special and unique with a hundred years of Graphic Packaging. He said the two plants employ over 1700 people with an economic impact of over three billion to our entire region from their investments here. He acknowledged Ms. Nirali Patel, Main Street Director and her crew for the accreditation of the downtown historic main street and he said that was a heavy lift and it's really special to celebrate that with Winnsboro, West Monroe, Ruston, and other communities in the area who finish this process together. On another note, he said the 9/11 memorial ceremony starts at 8:46 am with guest speaker Congressman Rodney Alexander. He said if you are available please come out it's a wonderful ceremony to honor those who gave the ultimate sacrifice during those times. He said if you experience any blockage, storm blockage, or anything like that to get in touch with public works as the City is expecting inclement weather. He said public works has list of sandbag locations and the list is also available online. Lastly, the Mayor stated the Monroe 11u All Stars who represented Monroe in the Diamond Youth World Series in Laurel, Mississippi made it to the semifinals. He said they played a total of 21 games in 6 weeks. He thanked the parents for all that they do and letting them experience these sporting events in different cities representing Monroe. He said the team recognized Mr. Oliver Che for going above and beyond for the team and he was presented with a bat.

(5.) Ms. Woods thanked the All-Star team and their parents for their support to their children. She noted this meeting will be a speed race to get in and get out. She said they are thinking about the

weather and more importantly the debate. She stated she started today off with a bang, and she started at the food bank. She said today started Hunger Action Day at the food bank and they package 3 pallets of food for seniors in their community. She further stated the food bank is in need of volunteers and if you have some spare time or organizations that want to get involved call the food bank. She said it is all about serving those that can't really serve themselves. On another note, she said on September 27th, 28th, and 29th a free featured documentary about a lady that lived in the Twin Cities, and it will be in West Monroe. She said she talks about her ancestry by Ms. Kim Ross. She expressed her condolences to Dr. Brantley, and she said she was an individual in the community that did great work. She thanked her friends from United Way for being at the meeting and she acknowledged Mr. Brandon Welch who is the Chairman of the West Monroe Chamber of Commerce.

Upon motion of Mr. McFarland and seconded by Mr. Muhammad, and the minutes of the Legal and Regular session of August 27, 2024, were unanimously approved.

Mr. Curtis Garth, 2300 Georgia Street, wanted to know what is supposed to happen when the minutes are approved.

Ms. Woods said they are talking about the minutes from the last meeting. She wanted to know if Mr. Garth had any objection to the minutes being approved.

Mr. Garth said he requested something at the last meeting and it's not on the agenda. He said if it's not on the agenda than the minutes can't be properly done, he guess.

Ms. Woods stated that is not necessarily true, however, to get on the agenda he was supposed to talk to Mr. Creekbaum. She said she doesn't know what happened with that situation.

Mr. Garth said he requested something to be on the agenda and he requested it in 2021, and it still hasn't been put on the agenda. He said he is trying to understand the purpose of approving the minutes.

Ms. Woods noted they are not going to entertain that right now and they had the same conversation last time. She further noted Mr. Garth's request is listed in the minutes and apparently he didn't take the necessary steps to get on the agenda.

Mr. Brandon Creekbaum, City Attorney, stated there is not a procedure for an individual to request to be added to the agenda or have an item consider. He said the agenda items are presented by the Council, or the Administration and the rules contemplate no process where an individual can demand to be placed on the agenda.

RESOLUTIONS AND MINUTE ENTRIES:

Council:

(a.) Upon motion Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and approved Resolution No. 8783 requiring specific Council authorization for all public work contracts and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.) (Mrs. Ezernack nay.)

(b.) Upon motion Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved to Passover a Resolution appointing Elijah Brass to the Monroe Capital Infrastructure Commission until the next Council meeting September 24, 2024. (There were no public comments.)

(c.) Upon motion Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8784 appointing Frankie Miller to the Monroe Board of Adjustment.

Ms. Woods thanked Ms. Miller for accepting this appointment and she asked if she had anything she would like to say.

Ms. Miller thanked Ms. Woods, and she said she looks forward to working on the Board of Adjustment.

(d.) Upon motion Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8785 appointing Eddie J. Douzart III to the Monroe Capital Infrastructure Commission. (There were no public comments.)

Ms. Woods said if you know Rev. Douzart tell him congratulations on his appointment.

(e.) Upon motion Mrs. Ezernack, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8786 re-appointing Donald Johnson to the Board of Directors of the Interstate 20 Economic Development Corporation. (There were no public comments.)

(f.) Upon motion Mrs. Ezernack, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8787 re-appointing Charles Pritchard to the Board of Directors of the Interstate 20 Economic Development Corporation. (There were no public comments.)

(g.) Upon motion Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8788 granting an exception to the Open Container Ordinance to the Twin City Arts Foundation for an Exhibition Reception and Talk for the River is the Road: Paintings by George Rodrigue at the Masur Museum of Art pursuant to Monroe City Code Sec. 12-231 D. (Open Container Ordinance), and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(h.) Upon motion Mrs. Ezernack, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8789 granting an exception to the Open Container Ordinance to the Chennault Aviation and & Military Museum for a Hot Air Balloon Festival pursuant to Monroe City Code Sec. 12-231 D. (Open Container Ordinance), and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Mayor Ellis noted Ms. Nell Calloway and the group at the aviation museum and if anybody is ever wondering things to do that are fun the Blue Dogs just approved a lot of things. He said all the events that help local nonprofits.

(i.) Upon motion Mrs. Ezernack, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8790 granting an exception to the Open Container Ordinance to the Northeast Louisiana Children's Coalition for the 2nd Annual Harvest Under the Stars: A Taste of the Garden pursuant to Monroe City Code Sec. 12-231 D. (Open Container Ordinance), and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Department of Administration:

(a.) Upon motion Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved to Consider request from the Purchasing Division for authorization for an authorized City representative to advertise for bids for the DeSiard St. Improvement (S. Grand St. to North 6th St.) Phase II. The engineer's estimate is \$4,539,767.28. The DBE goal is 15% and the source of funds is the Downtown Economic Development District.

Mr. Ben Marshall, 223 South Grand, said his wife and him are downtown residents, proud investors, and represent the Riverscape Condominium Association which is the nine story building where they live. He said they have about twenty units of voting households on behalf of Riverscape and they support this measure as well.

Mr. Cory Barr, 13 Loop Road, noted he stands before the Council and the Mayor not only as a business owner but a grateful resident of the community. He said he has spent the last 25 years of his life making opportunities, creating jobs, and generating tax dollars for the City of Monroe. He said he has spent millions of dollars in downtown Monroe and spending millions more over the next two years. He said currently he has a project underway that is projected to cost over \$2 million that will employ 40 to 50 people and will generate 3 to \$400,000 in tax revenue for the State and the City. He said some of those people are concerned for their safety and their wellbeing and quite frankly he has walked many of his own employees to their cars at night because they don't have good sidewalks. He said he paid for his sidewalks downtown and they don't have lighting or those things that infrastructure normal cities that talk about growth. He said he is simply here pleading to show concern for the City as a whole and any personal agendas they have to set aside for the greater good of the community. He said he is in favor of anything that can benefit the City and its residents and how people from the outside look at us.

Mr. Sean Christian, 2714 Caron Lane, Senior director of Facilities Management for St. Francis for Northeast Louisiana, said at the hospital over this past year they have made significant changes to the outside of their hospital. He said the First Baptist Church of Monroe they are in the process of a significant overhaul of that facility. He said he want the City and downtown Monroe to continue to grow and get better every single day. He said every year they bring in more medical students

and they want them to see what the City have to offer for them to stay. He said unfortunately Monroe is not a place to start a medical career. He said they are committed to Monroe and downtown Monroe, and they will continue to be here when some of the other facilities are no longer here. He noted they want to make the downtown area the place to go and hang out and feel safe.

Mr. Lee Denny, 1507 Park Avenue, thanked the Mayor and the City Council for the opportunity to speak and he thanked them for their willingness to serve the community and help it grow. He said in his former hometown Lake Providence he was on the Police Jury for eight years and he understands the jobs and role they do. He said he has been a business owner in Monroe for 32 years and a business owner in the downtown economic development footprint for several years. He said he has been serving on the DEDD for 4 years and in the last three years the board has made more progress than he has ever seen. He said they have the funding in place to make Monroe and downtown not only a vibrant place to be but a destination. He said make no mistakes about Monroe is the hub of Northeast Louisiana and it's not only for Monroe it's for the whole region. He said they completed Phase 1, and they are asking the Council to approve Phase 2. He said there are so many things that can happen, and they all have dreams of it and Monroe can be that destination impact for Northeast Louisiana that they believe it can be. He said the board is not about politics and they are trying to make Monroe the best version of itself that it can be to not only help Monroe but to help the region. He said they started Phase 1 several months ago and the project has been on the way about 3 years, and they want the Council to vote for them to move to Phase 2 which will complete from the river to 6th Street. He said it is going to do things in our community no matter where they live.

Mr. Fred Hill, 200 North 4th Street, said he has been in downtown business since 2001, and he appreciates the people in the community that have been good to his business. He said he has been on the DEDD board many years and they have put together projects and about two years ago they decided to take one project DeSiard Street and focus on that which is where they are right now.

Mr. Larry Bratton, 1545 Frenchman Bend, stated he also serves on the DEDD and there is nothing that makes him prouder than watching the growth of downtown. He said the City should be proud of the facilities here that are providing jobs for the community. He said they would appreciate the Council supporting Phase two of the DeSiard Street project.

Mr. McFarland stated all that was said on tonight was good, and he had an opportunity to have a great conversation with the head of the Engineering department. He said Mr. Morgan McCallister, City Engineer, was extra kind and gave him all the information he needed. He said he explained things to the T and also in the breath of conversation understanding downtown has a TIF which is excellent. He further stated they were able to obtain a bond to have all these funds and he explained to him the details and scope of the project downtown. He noted if he made a motion for something 99% chance of him voting against is not factual. He said he is going to support this, and he came with a made up mind to support it because of the head of the engineering department reaching out to him. He further noted he also want to see a TIF for the Southside and he said he gave the Mayor a letter concerning it. He said it has now been two months and he hasn't received not one answer from him concerning the letter. He said he desired to have the same matter of conversation he had with the department head with the Mayor. He said he is not the big bad wolf, and he is concerned about the people of his district, and he want it fair across the board. He said he deserves an answer, not ignored of his letter concerning the TIF for the Southside. He said he has talked to businesses downtown, and he understands. He said he needs the Mayor to understand his pain for the Southside board and what they need in order to survive and be productive on the Southside of Monroe.

Mr. Muhammad stated he is going to support this because downtown is the center of all economic growth and activity. He said in order for them to be the OneRoe they are striving to be SEDD deserves it's TIF. He further stated they have a plan, and they need to be included in the Master Plan for 25 years. He said they have asked the Mayor to include South Monroe in the Master Plan. He said SEDD has put a plan together, but it can't go anywhere if it's not funded, and they need the TIF. He said just like the gentlemen from DEDD came forward and fighting hard for downtown, but he appreciates if SEDD get the same respect. He said they are working out what difference they have on that board but when they bring the plan to support it.

Ms. Woods said she echoes the same sentiments as her colleagues.

There being no objection from the Council, Ms. Woods stated she would deviate for a moment to recognize Mr. John Barnett, National Civil Rights Activist visiting the City with the Jordans. She thanked him for being at the City Council meeting.

Department of Planning Urban Development:

(a.) Upon motion Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8791 authorizing a Subrecipient Agreement between the City of Monroe and the Louisiana Housing Corporation for \$127,943.00 in HUD/Emergency Solutions Grants Program Funding and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(b.) Upon motion Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8792 authorizing a Subrecipient Contact between the City of Monroe and Christopher Youth Center, Inc. for up to \$82,217.00 in HUD/Emergency Solutions Grants Program Funding and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(c.) Upon motion Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8793 authorizing a Subrecipient Contact between the City of Monroe and the Wellspring Alliance for families for up to \$42,000.00 in HUD/Emergency Solutions Grants Program Funding and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(d.) Upon motion Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8794 authorizing an Agreement between the City of Monroe and Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) AHAYA Community Development Corporation, Inc. in the amount of \$50,000.00 from HOME M-23-MC-23-0206, and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(e.) Upon motion Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8795 authorizing an Agreement between the City of Monroe and Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) Quest 4 Success in the amount of \$31,000.00 from HOME M-23-MC-23-0206, and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(f.) Upon motion Mrs. Ezernack, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8796 authorizing a Professional Services Agreement with United Way of Northeast Louisiana for the PUD TBRA Financial Education Series and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Mayor Ellis wanted to give flowers where they're due Planning and Urban Development and United Way. He said he had an opportunity to sit and visit with a lot of folks especially at the Christopher Youth Center. He said it was heartbreaking and refreshing at the same time to understand the Christopher Youth Center and their mission. He said it deals with teenage homelessness and United Way guides people to the services they need. He said please take a deep drive to see ways you can help similar to the food bank they're always looking for volunteers.

(g.) Upon motion Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8797 authorizing a Professional Services Agreement with Let's Fix It! LLC for the PUD's Nonprofit Capacity Building Program and further providing with respect thereto.

Ms. Kenya Roberson, Northeast Louisiana Black Chamber of Commerce, said Let's Fix It! LLC was amazing and she had the pleasure of being one of his students. She said she would suggest going forward whenever this program starts the chambers get the information for their nonprofit organization. She said this is definitely something that can be very advantageous to the nonprofit organizations because there is definitely a lot of information they are not privileged to, and he definitely dives in and dissect the program. She said she is for it, but she would like for the Chamber to be in the know for when its coming for them to advocate and make sure their members are apart of this wonderful program.

Ms. Woods stated Ms. Ellen Hill, Director of Planning and Urban Development, and her team are doing an amazing job. She said this kicks off the community engagement piece

Ms. Ellen Hill noted the professional service agreement is a part of the Action Plan that the Council approved a couple months ago. She said this kicks off the community engagement piece for the consolidated planning and for the next five years but more importantly they have made the committed to help the community. She said they are working with United Way with the idea that they need sustainability, and their goal is to have a capacity building institute for organizations that are at different phases. She further noted they are doing this primarily because they want to make sure the organizations that come to them for federal funds are adequately prepared to be able to take on that burden. She stated this is a series of workshops that will give them a chance to know about budgeting, the legalities, compliance, and requirements then be better prepared to seek funding. She stated if they want a functional community the nonprofit sector must be strong and that is one of the reasons they partner with Unity Way with the idea of really developing. She thanked the Council for the opportunity and for agreeing with the investment in their federal funds.

Ms. Woods thanked Ms. Hill for all that she does, and she said she is looking forward to more grants.

Mrs. Ezernack thanked them for all the hard work, and she congratulated the organizations that are going to be the recipients of the funds to help them expand their programming into the community.

Engineering Services:

(a.) Upon motion Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8798 approving Change Order No. One (1) for the WPCC – UV Disinfection System Project and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(b.) Upon motion Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8799 authorizing Task Order No. 8 with S.E. Huey Co. to provide CE&I for the La 15 (Winnsboro Road) Streetscaping Project and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Mr. McFarland said again he commend the head of the engineering department for taking the time out to go through this project with him. He said rested assure that what is going to happen on Winnsboro Road the Southside will have some improvements he promise. He said they will see some improvements on the Southside of Monroe, and he said just give them some time. He said they are going to make sure some things happen and with this project it's just a start. He said he really believe they would be happy with this improvement that will be coming forth in the very near future on Winnsboro Road.

INTRODUCTION OF RESOLUTIONS & ORDINANCES:

(a.) Upon motion Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and approved to Introduce an Ordinance repealing Ordinance No. 12,225 (Purchasing and Bidding Procedures) and further providing with respect thereto. (Mrs. Ezernack nay)

Ms. Lori Hursey, 302 Baron Road, stated she just moved back to Monroe two years ago and she wanted to find ways to help her city grow because she is impressed with everything. She said she is curious about the next three ordinances, and she wanted to know why they are repealing things that were just voted for in December. She wanted to know if there is concern with funding not being done correctly.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know if Ms. Hursey is a resident of the City of Monroe.

Ms. Hursey said she is a business owner, and she is a resident of Sterlington which is a Monroe area and affected by Monroe's Commerce. She said her business is 514 Finks Hideaway Road and 100 Fieldstone Lane both in Monroe.

Mr. McFarland stated he thinks Ms. Hursey information is incorrect and he said this came up just a few weeks ago. He said he brought this back to repeal and the Mayor decided to veto it. He said he is bringing it back and that is his prerogative as the City Councilman. He further stated under the previous Mayor the limit was \$30,000 now they have \$250,000 blank check that can assign contracts and move forward, and they think that is a little to much. He said they need to negotiate that down some and he said he is so glad she came forward to voice those concerns.

Ms. Hursey wanted to know how to support Mr. McFarland's concerns and she said it wasn't meant to be an accusation. She wanted to know what are the concerns because with her brief google

search which is possibly not accurate this was just passed June 11, 2024, and she wanted to know what has changed since that time.

Mr. McFarland said there was a Resolution in place now, it's a law and he is repealing that, and the change is the \$250,000 without Council's approval. He said he was not on the Council at that time.

Ms. Hursey wanted to know if Mr. McFarland didn't trust what the Council before him approved.

Mr. McFarland noted he guess he doesn't, and he placed it back on the agenda. He said again the \$250,000 is a little bit too much and that is his concern.

Ms. Hursey wanted to know if the amount had been misused in the past.

Mr. McFarland said it seems as if all the contracts aren't were they need to be at this present time. He said he will give a little bit more time on receiving that information and once he receives all information then he will speak on those matters. He said when the contracts aren't available for him to review in a timely fashion he thinks that is concern enough.

Mayor Ellis noted the City was sitting at \$30,000 for a public works contract the Police Jury 250, School Board is at 250, and every surrounding municipalities a third of our size were at 200 or more. He said to move and deliver projects in a more expedient manner they wanted to go along the lines of the purchasing policy for the State Legislative Auditor's threshold. He further noted the City still have to go under bid law, still have to get quotes, and those quotes the City go with the lowest bidder. He said the City still have to comply with all laws and before any accusations are levied the Purchasing Director has been on vacation, but he is back. He said those contracts that were requested will all be in the hands of Council. He said that is why he will continue to veto and that's his prerogative to move this forward. He said to continue to operate in a way to where they can fill a pothole and not have to wait six months before they have to do it. He said they can bring it back and forward which they have the right of Council to not agree with it and they can move it forward that is the checks and balances of government.

Ms. Hursey said she didn't want to just support one person, but she assumed the Council approved it a few months ago.

Mr. McFarland said yes, true enough it's the Mayor prerogative just like it's his prerogative but again they have to see the fairness of this. He said they have tried to talk, and it seems the Mayor doesn't want to talk to him at all. He said if he continues to veto then this Council will continue to do what they need to do. He noted they don't want to slow down the progress of the City and they want to know about the contracts and where they are going. He said when they say they are going to the lowest bidder the Mayor said he can negotiate with the individuals on the contract to get them at a certain bid and he doesn't like that at all. He said let's do it the right way and the lowest bidder is the lowest bidder not trying to negotiate in order for the Mayor to award that. He said when you open up a discussion be ready for a rebuttal because he is not going to lay there and let the Mayor say certain things and catch amnesia what he has said to him beforehand. He said he has an issue with this, and he will always have an issue with it. He said they can have meeting of the minds and work through this, but the Mayor doesn't even want to talk to him, that's the problem.

Ms. Kenya Roberson, Northeast Louisiana Black Chamber of Commerce, said they had lengthy discussions at varies Council meetings in reference to this. She said they requested, asked, and begged for it not to go up to that amount. She said they had over fifteen to twenty people that asked for that to not happen and it did pass. She said it wasn't abrupt and she appreciated Mr. McFarland for bringing it back up to show them he is listening. She said they want to make sure all businesses are able to have fair share whether small or huge businesses. She said they have to do things equally and fairly and there are varies contracts that will never be known if not questioned. She said they don't know how many agreements are signed every day and the only way for them to know is to inquire, call the Council, or come to the podium. She said from a Chambers perspective that have to answer to the members she serve, and they are not privileged to the information that is in the Council's packet she has to answer to them. She said she has asked in the past for the Professional Services that are listed, and she was given a general three page list. She said when her members

asked what do they do she need to able to explain it them entirety so that next year they are line and have the proper information to be the vendor on the City.

Ms. Sonya Jacobs, 700 University Avenue, said it wasn't about the 30,000 going to 250 just arbitrarily but it was a question about a fair and equitable distribution of the resources. She said she has heard business owner's come and vie for opportunities for the downtown economic development district. She said the City of Monroe is 64%, not minority but black and every city or municipality's procurement practices should reflect the community that it serves. She further noted when examine the City of Monroe procurement practices it nowhere reflected the 64% black community that it serves. She stated they were told they can't find DBEs and how do you say in a city this black that you can't find black people. She said there are 19 DBE certified firms in the Twin Cities. Her company is one of them and she has been DBE certified for some years. She further stated she has been accredited to have helped the DBEs in Northeast Louisiana for the State and roll up to their numbers to help them get certified and they're still not being used neither is her company. She said they have talked, addressed it, and had amicable discussion about how the City can move forward. She said they don't have a problem, and the bible says if you faithful over a few things will make you ruler over many. She said they weren't faithful over the 30 so why ask for a quarter of a million. She said when they looked at the City and compared their purchasing and procurement practices and \$250,000 they were doing they neglected to invoke the DBE policies and practices. She said they want to move forward because they want true economic development and those true procurement practices will be inclusive and not exclusive.

Mr. Roosevelt Wright, 2406 Oak Street, said he rose to address this item because of another issue and the charter for the City of Monroe allows the Council the prerogative to set all fees and franchises. He said it doesn't say contracts which means every single City Council gets a chance to decide whether it want to delegate some of its responsibility to the Mayor. He noted the last City Council chose to delegate it to the Mayor to the point of \$250,000 this City Council has chosen not. He said for the Mayor to say he's going to do outside of what the charter says would be an illegal act. He said it seems bad when the Mayor has the power to veto the Council because he will veto and keep doing the legal acts. He said at some point the Council is going to have to go to court and they can't use Mr. Creekbaum because his check is signed by the Mayor. He said the Council will have to get an attorney and sue because he's telling you every time you put it back on agenda he is going to veto it again. He further noted what the public need to understand this \$250,000 says the Mayor can up \$249,000 he can contract with whoever he want, and he has to say is he got quotes from somebody. He said he doesn't have to have any laws that says that he has to provide for any minority participation or anything and doesn't have to tell the Council or the public who he gave that contract to that's illegal because the charter gives that responsibility to the Council.

Mr. Muhammad said he appreciated Bishop McFarland for bringing this back because there has to be a meeting of the minds at some point. He said if there is not going to be a meeting of the minds they are going just be locked in here. He said in the meantime they will put some ordinances in place to strengthen the DBE participation. He said it is to many loopholes in the DBE participation and they have DBE participants having to get bonds when they really don't need to get them. He said for them to get the proper participation and get it at the proper percentage that's equitable to the City's population.

Mr. McFarland noted he need to make sure they all understand that he is not going to give up on this fight and he will continue to place it there until they move forward. He said if they have to go to court on it, but the Mayor cannot veto is resolution. He said since he has made this open statement, and he said they can put plenty of resolutions in place that the Mayor can't do anything about. He further noted they want the City to move forward but Mr. Mayor is going to have to sit down and have a conversation with him. He said all walking past, won't speak, talk to him, and won't answer his letters that has to stop. He said they can sit down and have a conversation about this and if it works for the department head it can work for him too. He noted he is again throwing the olive branch to sit down and have a conversation and if not they will put resolutions in place the Mayor can't override.

(b.) Upon motion Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and approved to Introduce an Ordinance repealing Ordinance No. 12,220 (Special Tax Election) and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.) (Mrs. Ezernack nay)

(c.) Upon motion Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved to Introduce an Ordinance amending Section 36-23 of the City of Monroe Code and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Mr. Muhammad stated this particular ordinance is being introduce dealing with the water rates going up automatically. He said they want to halt that and be able to take a look at the water rates and the amount they are going up to have a little bit more control of it. He said he has been talking to Mrs. Rowell about it briefly, but his particular ordinance is to halt the automatic increases on the water rate.

Ms. Woods said they are talking about halting the automatic increases and to understand they are not saying there won't be increases. She said it would come before the Council and then decide where they are with the water because the City prides itself for having excellent water. She said the City has a state of the art water treatment plant and they are trying to see if at all would be possible to give any kind of reprieve to our constituents and seniors in particular because they are on fixed incomes. She said this is one of the things they are just looking at and no one is saying anything is going to happen, but they will look at it.

Mr. Muhammad noted there are other communities that buy water from the City of Monroe, and he think they need to look at passing some of this cost onto those buying the water from the City not to the residents.

Mrs. Stacy Rowell, Director of Administration, said out the City limits do pay a higher rate.

Mr. Muhammad said Greater Ouachita isn't buying water from the City anymore.

Mrs. Rowell said they cut back, and she is not sure if they completely pulled out. She said they still have Town and Country who buy from the City.

Mr. Muhammad said he doesn't want to see some much of the cost being passed on to the citizens of Monroe.

Mr. Sean Benton, Water System Manager, said he is probably totally against this overall and he said if you look across the nation of water systems itself they're failing because of underfunding more than anything. He said currently the City just built a \$30 million plant with 30 years to pay on it and they used maybe 10 to 12 million of that money. He said outside of that they still have water distribution lines that need to be repaired and water mains blowing everywhere currently right now. He noted the City water rates are still below the national average when it comes per thousand and the citizens of Monroe should be proud of what the City have going on. He further noted the City have a great state of the art plant that's been put in place that drives economic development. He said he thinks they should look at opportunities to keep funding the water system and also at the same time the City have sewer issues. He said the water rates are based on sewer usage with an estimate of probably 100 million for sewer projects that need to happen currently and another 6 million for water line projects that need to happen. He stated relating to Greater Ouachita the City lost \$3 million hit annually by losing them as customers and they didn't have time for an additional bond to do water distribution projects.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know when Greater Ouachita pull out.

Mr. Benton stated two and half years ago.

Mr. Muhammad noted for clarification the increase was implemented in 2018 and the City didn't anticipate Greater Ouachita pulling out.

Mr. Benton said they didn't know anything until Greater Ouachita pulled out. He said the contract was signed and they were turning dirt out there at the location.

Mayor Ellis said there is additional federal funding to help rural communities to stand up their own water system.

Mr. Benton said the rates will have to keep increasing to keep up with mandate and there is a contamination out there called PFAS something huge they will have to start testing. He said at times change regulatory issues are going to come up. He said chemical costs go up based on gas and oil prices. He said there are so many factors in doing business right now that's why a lot of utilities in smaller communities can't afford to have quality water because they don't have the resources.

Mr. McFarland stated some things Mr. Benton said were good and there are some things he disagrees. He said Mr. Benton said he is totally against this Ordinance, and he is saying he is against the fact the Council should take a look at it to see if they need the increase or not. He said the ordinance is not about repealing but to just take a look at it every year. He further stated the other issue he have is when he gets his water bill the gallons of water equal to the gallons of sewer, impossible. He said the water he use to wash his truck and water his garden is called sewer water too; it's not going in the sewer. He said they are being charged for the same usage of water equal to the same amount of usage for sewer that's problematic. He said that is why he feels they need to have a retreat to rectify some of the issues because it's not right. He said if things are going well, and they are in the black and they don't need to increase at that moment or year they give the citizens of Monroe a bypass but the next year it may be back in place. He said this is not repealing anything and they just want to take a look at it to make a final decision to make the best decision for Monroe.

Mr. Benton said he agrees, and he believes transparency is important more than anything and he said he has been in that plant for over 25 years. He said he know where they came from and where they are trying to get too. He said seeing what is currently going on he doesn't want to see any that push them back. He said he supports transparency, and he support people who understand what they are doing and how they are trying to move the City forward as it comes to water itself. He said mark his words on how many water system will fail when the storm comes and at the end of the day they are passionate about what they do at the water system plant.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know how much of the American Resue Act funds was put into the water system.

Mr. Benton noted off the top of his head around 13 or 14 million.

Mr. Muhammad stated that is a lot of money and he wanted to know how much did the City get from the government American Rescue Act.

Mr. Benton noted about 18 million.

Mr. Muhammad stated the City put 14 of 18 million dollars into the water treatment plant. He said that's fine and that is what the Council prior to them did but he doesn't think all that 18 million dollars for the City to put 14 million into to the water treatment plant when the City have other issues.

Mr. Benton noted when the City had a \$40 million price tag for the water treatment plant they were looking for every funding mechanism possible. He further noted they generated money revenue from the water fund to help pay for it. He said they also generated funds from selling municipal bonds that they are paying on also.

Mr. Muhammad said instead of first passing it on to the citizens he think they can find other ways to find some money. He said the American Rescue Act money was a blessing because that money came down through covid. He said didn't get down to the people it was poured all into the plant. He said even the Police Juror was able to give money to nonprofits to help the community.

Mrs. Ezernack this is only for introduction this evening and moved to vote aye for introducing.

RESOLUTIONS AND ORDINANCES FOR SECOND READING AND FINAL ADOPTION AND SUBJECT TO PUBLIC HEARING:

The Chairman Open the Hearing and seeing no on come forward the Hearing was Closed:

(a.) Upon motion of Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved Ordinance No. 12,235 declaring property in the Monroe Air Industrial Park no longer necessary for public use and authorizing said property to be sold to private sale to Ochsner LSU Health

System of North Louisiana and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

The Chairman Open the Hearing:

(b.) Upon motion of Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and approved Ordinance No. 12,236 repealing an Ordinance No. 12,192, which purported amended the Monroe City Charter without voter approval, and to restore the Charter to its prior state. (Mrs. Ezernack Nay)

Mr. Roosevelt Wright, 2406 Oak Street, noted the Monroe City charter has some provisions that says in order to amend the charter must be presented to the public to vote on it. He said this particular ordinance changed the departments and put it under another. He further noted the ordinance said amending the Monroe City charter that cannot be. He said the City Council cannot amend the Monroe City charter and he said he spoke against it at that time, and he wrote against it in the newspaper. He said the Mayor is probably going to veto this one as well, but the reality is that it is a legal issue, and they have to follow the charter. He said they can reorganize the departments any way they want, and all the Mayor has to do is tell them he is going to reorganize the department but to amend the City charter they can't do that without the vote of the public. He said this needs to be repealed and if the Mayor vetoes this the Council needs to get a lawyer because if he can't keep vetoing and keep doing it illegally.

The Chairman closed the hearing seeing no one come forward.

Mrs. Ezernack wanted Mr. Creekbaum to speak about the legality of what the Council is doing here this evening.

Mr. Creekbaum said he is responding to what Mr. Wright just said and the only portion of it that he quibble with a little bit was Mr. Wright said the Mayor is doing something illegal. He said he would remind Mr. Wright that the Mayor proposed a reorganization under section 4:10 of the charter that required him to submit a letter to the Council informing the Council of it's reorganization. He said at that time the Council had 60 days to act or not act and Mr. Wright's issue is with the action that the Council took not any action the Mayor took. He said the Mayor's step was singular procedural step submitting a letter to the Council, so the Mayor didn't approve any resolution or ordinance that came before this body. He said he still doesn't fully understand the full intent of the ordinance is singularly to point out that the charter itself was not amended and clarify the action of a previous Council or if the intent of this ordinance is to undo the approval that was granted back then. He said he can't opine on it further because he is not fully informed of the intent of what this is supposed to accomplish in effect.

Ms. Woods noted she was the only no vote when this came through Council and clearly they were being misled because the ordinance itself said amend. She said with it saying amend they were indefinite violation of the charter because the charter clearly states that you can't amend or change without taking it to the electors. She said that was her argument then and that's still her argument now. She further noted she sent for an attorney general's opinion on it and the Attorney General told her she couldn't ask by herself it had to come on behalf of the whole Council. She said stated the Council was in favor of it so she couldn't get that approved. She said she talked to an attorney that said clearly they were in violation, and she was one person amongst four and there was nothing done. She said she think because they were led astray and in her opinion they did it illegally at the time that it should be reversed and then revoted on.

Mr. McFarland said he had the same sentiments on this matter, and he thinks Mr. Creekbaum with conversations with him knows he looks at certain words. He said he brought it to his attention that word there amend messed up the whole deal and he didn't write it, put it in there, but he found it in there. He said there it is amended, and they want to spend up some of the City's money to go to court. He said let's repeal this and give it to the people to vote on it that's all they are saying. He stated to give the citizens of Monroe the right to vote it up or vote it down. He said the Council did not have the right and it is because of the wording, and he was not on the Council when they put that wording in there, you all did it. He said all they are trying to do is correct it and take it back to the people vote it up or down. He said if the people say no then we are back where we supposed to be.

Ms. Woods said clearly Mr. Creekbaum and her can agree on this the Mayor does have the authority because of his position to do organizational changes anyway that he wants. She said the problem was whoever wrote that ordinance wrote it wrong.

Mr. Creekbaum said the point that was just made is correct. He said in part, if it is proposed as a referendum, there are two separate in the charter governing how this particular issue can be addressed. He said one by the administration reorganization in 4:10 and the other is by general referendum. He said he is just pointing out some things in the charter can be changed by ordinance or act of the Council because the charter says it can be changed by ordinance or act of the Council. He said the Mayor's salary, Council's salary, and administration reorganization are one these are things where the expedite power to say whether than having to go back to the people to change these things they can change it by administrative act of the Council which is usually important. He noted there are some other things such as the popular referendum section unless the charter says it can be changed by this process then it goes back to the vote of the people.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know if Mr. Creekbaum is saying if the Council take this to court if the City wins.

Mr. Creekbaum said he is saying they need to have a legal discussion.

Mr. McFarland stated he differs with Mr. Creekbaum with that one word, and you can't take that one word back. He said the only way to rectify this is to repeal it and then bring it back to the people. He said this should not be a Mayor's decision it should be the people's decision on this matter. He said the only thing they are saying in order to achieve the goal the Mayor desires to just do it the right way.

Mr. Muhammad said PUD is a very important department and it stands on it's on. He said it's not even about the person that is the head of that department but it's about the charter. He said when you use the word amend he think that is where they run a foul and you can't amend it. He noted the Mayor can bring a reorganization to the Council to approve it pending taxpayers approval.

Mr. Creekbaum said that is not the process specified in the charter and he is happy to discuss the legalities.

Mr. Muhammad said they are going to pull it back and if the Mayor want to veto he hope he doesn't and just put it back. He said whatever problem there is in the department they can work that out and he hasn't seen a new reorganization chart.

The Chairman Open the Hearing and seeing no one come forward the Hearing was Closed:

(c.) Upon motion of Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved Ordinance No. 12,237 authorizing the City of Monroe to take corporeal possession of and sell to Karen M. Jefferson, all rights, title, and interest that the city may have acquired to the Lot in Lot 1, Sq. 2, Resub Sq. 18, Terminal Heights Addition, Ouachita Parish, no situs – Reed St., District 4, Monroe, La, by Adjudication at Tax Aale dated June 4, 2018, and further providing with respect thereto.

The Chairman Open the Hearing and seeing no on come forward the Hearing was Closed

(d.) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved Ordinance No. 12,238 authorizing the City of Monroe to take corporeal possession and sell to Kevin Lee, all rights, title, and interest that the city may have acquired to the South 35', Lot 1, Square 90, Lee Avenue Addition, Ouachita Parish, 3001 ½ Lee Ave., District 4, Monroe, La, by adjudication at tax sale dated June 11, 2019, and further with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

The Chairman Open the Hearing and seeing no on come forward the Hearing was Closed.

(e.) Upon motion of Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved Ordinance No. 12,239 amending and re-enacting Chapter 13 of the Monroe City Code, Entitled Drainage and Flood Control, and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

The Chairman Open the Hearing and seeing no on come forward the Hearing was Closed

(f.) Upon motion of Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved Ordinance No. 12,240 Ordinance approving a Lease Agreement between the City of Monroe and

Miller International Properties, LLC for the parcel and building located at 507 Wood Street and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Ordinances Vetoed Ordinances (Ord. No. 12,229 and 12,230)

(g.) Ms. Carolus Riley, Council Clerk, The Mayor vetoed Ordinance No. 12,229 and Ordinance No. 12,230 and returned them to the Council on August 27, 2024, at 7:58 p.m. The Mayor's veto, along with his veto message, was delivered to the Council on August 27, 2024, at 8:31 p.m. The veto and veto messages for each Ordinance will be maintained in the Council records.

Citizen's Participation:

(1) Mr. James Tatum, Transit employee, said that there are a lot of things going on at Transit that he and the Mayor had discussed. He hopes that the Mayor will stop and listen to what they have to say about things going on at Monroe Transit. He has concerns about how the Monroe Transit Department has become a revolving door with the younger or newer employees not staying based on what management has insinuated. He said that they are working in a hostile environment, and he really hopes that it stops. He wants to know how to stop management from poisoning their minds against the union. The younger employees are being told by management that the union isn't this or that, mainly sowing seeds of discord in the workspace amongst the employees. He stated that their job is to train them to be successful operators with longevity and tenure just like he has, since he's been a part of Monroe Transit for 20 years. He is requesting a meeting with the Mayor and his representative. He believes that it is time for them to have a conversation concerning these issues they are having in order for them to be in one accord. He also added that the senior citizens still work and use public transportation, they don't have enough seats with covers over them in three-digit weather, inclement weather, cold weather, etc. or no covers with seats. He said that this needs to be rectified.

(2) Mr. Curtis Garth, 2300 Georgia Street, said that the Lord God Almighty is who we serve. He stated when there is a crime, it gets reported. He said to the Mayor and Police Officers that he has reported several crimes, and they refuse to properly investigate reported crime. He said that the City of Monroe has police records where they are falsifying records. He said they won't put it on the agenda because they refuse to discuss it. He said that during the hurricane a few years back the State of Louisiana gave \$15 Billion dollars when Kathleen Blanco was in office. He said that when John Bell was in office, they received \$3 Billion dollars from the State, he raised taxes and still had a \$2 million dollars deficit. He said all you have to do is look at the judging order because we ended up with a \$133 million dollar surplus. He said that he doesn't know what else to do for the City to assist him with this matter.

(3.) Ms. Gwen J. Dickson, 100 Memorial Drive, said that if the people who were hired would do their job, then our city would be a better place to live. She said that she has tried several attempts to schedule a meeting with Chief Zordan, but she hasn't received one. She said that she has gone to the Public Safety Building several times and nothing. She said that that Corp. Kwaskic Heckard tried to speak with her, but she refused to speak to him because she wanted to speak with the Chief. She said that she wanted to file a complaint and was told to go to Wood Street. She said that the people were extremely rude, and she spoke with one detective that was nice to her, but when she went back to follow up, the detective was on vacation for two weeks. She said that the police officers need to get themselves together or eventually, they will be sued. She said that she feels that her grandson has been profiled by the police because of the type of vehicle they are driving. She said that she will not allow the police to harass her grandson.

(4.) Ms. Kenya Roberson, Black Chamber of Commerce, thanked the ones that decided to accept the invitation to be a panelist for the Government Luncheon at the end October. She said the event will be held at Civic Center at 11 o'clock and most of the Mayors, Aldermen, and Councils that represent in the 13 parishes. She said that out of the 13 parishes, they will have 7 of the mayors present at the event on the panel. She said that she hates that the Mayor won't be there because it's at the Civic Center and the Mayor won't be present. She said that she has extended several invitations to the Mayor, and he hasn't been available to attend. She said it is her prayer that one day she will see the Mayor at one of their events.

(5.) Ms. Johnnie Thomas, 414 South 8th Street, said that some things equal common sense. She said that we are all in this together and we need to be on one accord. She said that we have all these ministers here, we need to pray and get along. She said that these meetings have really gotten out

of hand, and it doesn't make sense. She said that we are all adults, and we have children, grandchildren and this is not the way to act. She said that things that have gone on here are very ugly and that we need to pray and pray and get on one accord.

(6.) Ms. Mondrian Douglas, 5513 Long Drive, thanked Councilman McFarland and Muhammad for suggesting her to be on the Board of Adjustments. She said that one of the requirements is that you have to own property to serve on the board. She said since she doesn't own any property, she was not able to serve on the board. She said that when she qualified to run for office she wasn't asked if she owned any property. The two Presidential candidates that are running weren't asked if they own any property, only requirement was living in the United States for 14 years. She said that she feels like they need to change the verbiage in their bylaws about people owning property, that shouldn't qualify you to serve on the board. She also stated that it saddens her that our people have to come up and complain about being harassed by the police. She said that Mr. Creekbaum should be making sure that the people that are wearing uniforms are not a walking liability. There being no further business to come before the council, the meeting was adjourned at 8:27 p.m., upon motion of Mr. McFarland and it was seconded by Mr. Muhammad.

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.