

City Hall, Monroe, Louisiana
January 10, 2023
6:00p.m.

There was a legal and regular session of the City Council of the City of Monroe, Louisiana held this date at the Council's regular meeting place, the Council Chamber, City Hall Building, Monroe, Louisiana.

The Honorable Chairman Kema Dawson, called the meeting to order. She then asked the clerk to call roll.

There were present: Mrs. Ezernack, Ms. Woods, Mr. Marshall, and Mrs. Dawson

There was absent: Mr. Harvey

Chairman Dawson announced that a quorum was present, and that the Invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance would be led by Chief Operating Officer Jimmie Bryant.

COMMUNICATIONS & SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Mrs. Ezernack welcomed everyone to the Council meeting, and she said she is happy to see everyone sharing their evening with the Council.

Ms. Wood said Happy New Year and it is good to see everybody here. She stated she is wearing a mask because she is experiencing cold like symptoms, but it is not covid. She welcomed the students of Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School, and she said it is good to see them here. She said it gives the children the opportunity to see how the Council takes care of the City's business. She said it's good to see them and please come back again.

Mr. Marshall said welcome to everyone, and he said it's always good to see the kids active and involved in the community. He thanked everyone for coming out to the Council meeting and he said Happy New Year to everyone. He addressed the statement he made at the last Council meeting which was an apology to Mrs. Ezernack. He said the words he used was on behalf of, which he shouldn't have used but his apology remains the same. He further noted it was not the NAACP or Southside Economic Development District that made the comment collectively, but it was one individual. He said no disrespect to the NAACP or SEDD and he hopes there was no damage done to either organization for that comment. He said the apology remains and that is what he wanted to relate to the community.

Mrs. Dawson said Happy New Year to everyone, and she said it is good to see everyone. She announced the MLK Youth Resource Fair on Monday January 16th from 10am until 2pm at the Powell Community Center. She said there will be free lunch and door prizes for everyone ages 15 to 24. She said come out to learn about the Summer job opportunities. She said the 44th Annual Martin Luther King Salute sponsored by the City of Monroe will be Tuesday January 17th and theme is "Together We Can Beat the Dream" at the Jack Howard Theatre at 10am.

Mayor Friday Ellis said this is a special night and it is great to see future leaders of our community present at the Council meeting. He welcomed everyone and said it is good to see everyone's smiling faces. He stated it is refreshing to see the young men and women here tonight and suggested they turn their ears on because there may be things spoken about at Council meeting, that may affect them in the future. He noted the City has met with the Southern Rail Commission, Amtrak, and Transportation 4 America again to bring passenger rails service to the City of Monroe. He echoed Mrs. Dawson asking everyone to join the City for the 44th Annual MLK celebration to honor the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King and recognize our local heroes who are making a great impact in our community. He further noted the celebration will be Tuesday January 17th at 10am and the City partnered with the Monroe City Schools this year to give the children the opportunity to be present. He said also register today for the MLK Day Resource Fair on next Monday to learn about Summer job opportunities with the City of Monroe. On another note, Mayor Ellis announced he's representing the City of Monroe at the Mayor's Institute on City Design in partnership with the Just City Lab at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. He said he will be joining cohorts from Albany, New York, Albuquerque, New Mexico, Arlington, Texas, Kansas City, Missouri, Pensacola, Florida, Santa Fe, New Mexico, and St. Louis, Missouri. He said this is building upon an initiative that the City has brought in front of the Mayor's Institute

of Design which is Charles Johnson Park and how to reimagine it. He noted this goes along with the City's partnership Recreation Plan and the City will be paired with national architects, experts in the field of preservation, landscape architecture, urban planning, art activism, and housing to bring something back to turn into public policy. He further noted he is excited to represent the citizens of Monroe and build new relationships with other Mayors. He said speaking of public art and public policy to recognize champions in our community he has a proclamation to give to some special people. He asked if anyone is present that represents the Biedenharn Museum & Gardens, Bry Art Gallery at University of Louisiana at Monroe, Louisiana Purchase Garden Zoo, Master Museum, Museum of National History Northeast Louisiana, Northeast Louisiana Children Museum, Delta African American Heritage Museum, or Precious Legacy Museum & Archives to come forward. The proclamation states Mayor Friday Ellis and the Monroe City Council established January 2023 as Monroe's Museum Month and they recognize the importance of education, culture, and beauty in diversity as prime factors of creating great living environments. He said they recognize the importance of museums as a positive attraction for our City, residents, and visitors to Monroe. He said they applaud the Monroe's nine museums for being positive attractions for the Monroe citizens and visitors making Monroe the best it can be. He said the Monroe City Council and himself are happy to celebrate our museums as they commemorate Monroe museum month with special programs with their welcoming arms and open doors. He stated on behalf of the Monroe City Council and our citizens, deem it an honor and a privilege to recognize Monroe's museums month January 2023.

Ms. Nell Calloway, Chennault Museum, stated she appreciates the City support, and she thinks it's really unique that the City has many museums in this area that are partnered together. She said she thinks it speaks a lot to the leadership that we can all come together and support our great community.

Mr. Ralph Calhoun, Biedenharn Museum, echoed Ms. Calloway thanking the City for supporting the museums. He invited everyone to come out to get a museum passport. He said when you visit five museums in the month of January you are registered for a prize and every museum after that you are re-registered. He said you can go to any museum website or Facebook to find more information.

Upon motion of Mr. Marshall, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack the minutes of the Legal and Regular Session of December 27, 2022, were unanimously approved. (There were no public comments.)

Presentation: Audit Presentation – Allen, Green & Williamson, LLP External Auditor Tim Green:

Mr. Tim Green, External Auditor, said it is a pleasure to be here and he has met with each Council member to go over the audit in detail. He said the airport improvement program and Transit were both tested and there were no comments. He gave kudos to Mr. Marc Keenan, Transit General Manager and Mr. Charles Butcher, Airport Director in regard to the job they have done. He said the change in the fund balance in general was good and the City had about \$700,000.00 of the remaining balance. He said the City spent about 60 million a year which is about 5 million a month and have about 20 million remaining in the fund balance. He commended the City Council and the Mayor for the fund balance, and he said it was almost 19 to 20 million, but they budgeted about 17 million to the end of the year. He said the long-term debt decreased by 21 million for the City's debt over all which is very good. He said the employee group health insurance program did very well this year it typically runs a deficit and with claims this year it was about a 2.8 million dollar excess this year. He said they had a few funds that decreased meaning the expenses were more than the revenue, but a vast majority of those funds were in Capital Infrastructure and the I-20 program.

Ms. Jennie Henry, CPA Audit Manager, said this year in the federal compliance audit the City received 13.6 million dollars in federal funding. She said that doesn't include the rescue plan money because none of it was spent this year but 17.4 million was spent last year. She said two of the largest areas the City receives money was the airport and transit. She said there was one finding for the City in the audit report and that had to do with the bond continuing disclosure. She said the Bond Covenant should be uploaded to the Electronic Municipal Market Access (EMMA) this is where advisors that want to invest can find this information. She said it was not uploaded last year but she thinks it has already been taken care of this year. She said the legislative auditor had reinstated the Agreed Upon Procedures the City did well with those expectations. She said one was a deposit made a day later than what was the recommended time limit and one had to do with

a credit authorization that was authorized by the same person who made the purchase but that had to do with the department heads.

Mr. Green said over all the financial report was good this year and he said they appreciate the City and staff that were involved with it. He said Ms. Yolanda Washington, Internal Auditor, has been a great help throughout the year and they appreciate the work she has done.

Proposed Condemnations:

The following condemnations were considered:

1. 4103 Beale Street (D3) (Owners – Ted & Dorothy W. Hatfield; Investment Tree c/o Reg. Agent Lorenzo Kelly) Notice to show cause was served. Photographic evidence was presented. Upon motion of Ms. Woods, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved, the building was condemned, and the property owner given 6 months in which to bring the structure into compliance with the Code or demolish the Structure and clean the lot.

Mr. Tommy James, Code Enforcement Officer, stated this property was presented in Environmental Court in June 2022. He said he spoke with the Agent who is present at Council meeting tonight. They are asking that the property be condemned, and owner given 90 days to bring the property back into compliance.

Ms. Woods said she's had conversations with Mr. Lorenzo Kelly, and she has spoken to the Council Chair. She asked Mr. Kelly to come up to the podium to speak briefly about what is going on with this property.

Mr. Lorenzo Kelly, 418 Oregon Trail, stated he purchased the property in 2020 at a tax sale and he has kept the grass cut but he can't touch the house because it is not officially in his name. He said the property will switch over in his name July 1, 2023, and he is asking for more time to bring the property into compliance. He further stated he had two other properties in the City of Monroe in the same condition that people are currently living in that he restored.

Ms. Woods said Mr. Kelly is buying these properties and rehabbing them but currently this property is not in Mr. Kelly's name. She said her motion is to give Mr. Kelly six months and she said it does take time before anything starts to happen. She said she would like for it to be on record giving Mr. Kelly six months to continue restoring the property. She thanked Mr. Kelly for what he is doing with the property. She stated one of the things they are doing in the community is to encourage individuals to buy properties and rehab them to increase the base for people to have nice places to live. She motions to condemn the property giving the agent six months to rid the property of all noxious growth and debris.

Mrs. Dawson advised Mr. Kelly to secure the back of the property to prevent any additional damage to it.

Ms. Woods wanted to verify if Mr. James had conversations with Mr. Kelly about this property.

Mr. James said yes, that's why they had agreed to 90 days, but he is good with the six months.

Ms. Woods said she wants to make sure everything stays in place, and she said the City might get overly azaleas to tear it down before Mr. Kelly can get it done.

Mr. James said that's not going to happen.

Ms. Woods said she knows that but for the record she would like for it to say six months.

Mrs. Ezernack wanted Mrs. Sturdivant to explain the law behind Mr. Kelly taking possession of the property.

Mrs. Angie Sturdivant, City Attorney, said it is her understanding Mr. Kelly purchased the property at a tax sale and he wants to make sure that the redemption period passes before he invests money into the property which is typically three years. She said at this point the property owner could pay the taxes and they could keep the property.

Mrs. Ezernack wanted to know if the City needs to qualify that the Council is giving this opportunity to Mr. Kelly and not to the property owner of record. She said because they could come in to ask for more time if they redeem the property.

Mrs. Sturdivant said she will make a note in the file, and she asked Mr. James to do the same. She said to ensure in July that the taxes on the property aren't paid and not redeemed to see where they are in the process. She said she was looking for the Environmental Court order because she was concerned with it being an open structure. She said the property owner of record has been ordered to secure the property within 15 days but if not, public works can secure the property.

Ms. Woods wanted to clarify that Public Works can secure the property.

Mrs. Sturdivant said yes ma'am.

Ms. Woods wanted to clarify that Mr. Kelly can't do anything to the property even though he is paying taxes on the property.

Mrs. Sturdivant said Investment Tree LLC which is owned by Mr. Kelly is listed as the property owner. She said if the property is redeemed Ted and Dorothy Hatfield could pay the taxes and still be the property owner.

Ms. Woods wanted to clarify that the property owner had 15 days to close the property because it is an open structure. She said they haven't done anything, but public works can close it up.

Mrs. Sturdivant said from the Environmental Court Order, yes.

Mrs. Ezernack wanted to know if that would be a charge for the public works service.

Mr. James said yes.

Mrs. Ezernack wanted to know would that charge be included in Mr. Kelly's final deed and would be filed with the taxes.

Mr. James said he can do it himself which would be the best thing.

Ms. Woods said if the City does it that will be an additional cost.

Mr. Kelly asked if he could secure the structure.

Ms. Woods said yes, she would think Mr. Kelly can do it.

Mrs. Ezernack advised Mr. Kelly to protect his investment.

Ms. Woods said that way he doesn't have any additional charges on the back end.

2. 3405 Renwick Street (D3) (Owner – Marcus Antione Drummer) Notice to show cause was served. There was no one present. Photographic evidence was presented. Upon motion of Ms. Woods, seconded by Mr. Marshall and unanimously approved, the building was condemned, and the property owner given 30 days in which to bring the structure into compliance with the Code or demolish the Structure and clean the lot. (There were no public comments.)

Mr. James stated this is an open dilapidated structure, and it is becoming unsafe. They are asking that the property be condemned, and owner given 30 days to bring the structure into compliance or forward the property to public works to have it demolish.

Ms. Woods said this property is definitely a nuisance in the community and she wish they could tear it done immediately. She motioned to condemn the property and give the property owner 30 days to bring it into compliance and remove all noxious growth and debris.

3. 1009 Thomas Avenue (D5) (Owner – Linda Gean Evans c/o Gloria Evans Notice to show cause was served. There was no one present. Photographic evidence was presented. Upon motion of Mrs. Dawson, seconded by Ms. Woods and unanimously approved, the building was condemned, and the property owner given 30 days in which to bring the structure into compliance with the Code or demolish the Structure and clean the lot. (There were no public comments.)

Mr. James stated the property burnt in December of 2020 and it was an open structure until the City shut the doors. They are asking that the property be condemned, and owner given 30 days. Mrs. Dawson wanted to know if Mr. James has been in communication with the Evan's.

Mr. James stated he had no communication with the property owner.

Mrs. Dawson wanted to know if anyone was present from the Evan's family to represent this property. She motions to condemn the property and giving the owner 30 days to bring the structure into compliance removing any noxious growth or debris.

Council:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Marshall seconded, by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved a Resolution No. 8420 confirming the appointment of Preston Hopkins to the Southside Economic Development District Board of Commissioners and further providing with respect thereto.

Ms. Kenya Roberson, 116 Glenwood Drive, stated her only comment in reference to this item is she has become very aware of the Southside Economic Development District. She said going to the meetings and becoming knowledgeable of how it works she is concerned it is an all-male board. She said nothing against Mr. Preston Hopkins because she doesn't know who he is, but she suggested when considering board members that it be diverse. She said diversity includes women and she said for the record she is not saying it should be her. She said she thinks a lady is needed for more reasons than one but for the future she thinks that the board needs to reflect a little more diversity with inclusion of a female.

Mr. Marshall thanked Mr. Hopkins for stepping up to represent District 4 and being a servant to the community.

Mr. Preston Hopkins said he appreciates the offer and hopefully he can serve and do a great job.

Department of Administration:

(a) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack seconded, by Mr. Marshall and unanimously approved to consider six (6) Renewal Applications for a New 2023 Class A Alcoholic Beverage Permit. The Monroe Police Department has disqualifying records and Sales Tax has been approved. (There were no public comments.)

(b) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack seconded, by Mr. Marshall and unanimously approved to consider three (3) Renewal Applications for a New 2023 Class B Alcoholic Beverage Permit. The Monroe Police Department has disqualifying records and Sales Tax has been approved. (There were no public comments.)

(c) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack seconded, by Ms. Woods and unanimously approved a Resolution No. 8421 accepting as substantially complete work done by and between the City of Monroe and Grindstone Construction, LLC, for the Central Warehouse Limited Improvements Project, and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Mayor's Office:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Marshall seconded, by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved a Resolution No. 8422 authorizing Mayor Friday Ellis to enter into a Community Public Art Grant Agreement between the City of Monroe and the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism and further providing with respect thereto.

Mr. Barry Stevens, President of Northeast Louisiana Arts Council, said he is excited because this is public art and good public art is good for us. He said it gives you joy, it can relieve stress, it can inspire future generations, and it enriches communities. He said there were nine grants awarded in the State of Louisiana and the City of Monroe was the only city that received a grant in Northeast Louisiana. He said the Arts Council is happy to work with the City of Monroe and he said they will assist in hosting the artist call through their website for review and selection. He thanked the City Council and the Mayor for their efforts in this matter.

Mayor Ellis asked Mr. Stevens to explain what the grant is for and what the artwork will become.

Mr. Stevens said he understands it will be two basketball courts located at Powell Recreation and Charles Johnson Park where an artist will be selected, and they will paint the basketball courts. He said it will be a design that will inspire generations as they play basketball.

Department of Public Works:

(a) Upon motion of Ms. Woods seconded, by Mr. Marshall and unanimously approved a Resolution No. 8423 authorizing Mayor Friday Ellis to accept any grant officers from the FAA through December 31, 2023, for the Monroe Regional Airport that do not require matching funds, and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Mrs. Ezernack said to apply for the grant it still goes through the regular process but her only concern was that the Council would lose sight of which ones they have received by not approving them as they come in. She said a lot of times that keeps the Council in the loop to what is going on at the airport.

Mr. Charles Butcher, Airport Director, said all the grants will still come before the Council and this gives the Mayor the opportunity to sign for the grant itself. He said if there are any projects going forward, they would present those to the City Council, and this is just allowing the Mayor to receive the money.

Mrs. Ezernack said she just wants to make sure the Council always knows what's going on because there are always exciting opportunities.

(b) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack seconded, by Ms. Woods and unanimously approved a Resolution No. 8424 authorizing a designated city representative to enter into a Professional Services Agreement with KSA Engineering, to provide Engineering Services for the Monroe Regional Airport and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(c) Upon motion of Mrs. Mr. Marshall seconded, by Ms. Woods and unanimously approved a Resolution No. 8425 authorizing a designated city representative to enter into a Professional Services Agreement with Volkert Inc, to provide Engineering Services for the Monroe Regional Airport and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(d) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack seconded, by Ms. Woods and unanimously approved a Resolution No. 8426 authorizing a designated city representative to enter into a Professional Services Agreement with Garver USA, to provide Engineering Services for the Monroe Regional Airport and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Police Department:

(a) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack seconded, by Ms. Woods and unanimously approved a Resolution No. 8427 authorizing the donation of one (1) Monroe Police Department Unit, specifically, Unit #2568, 2017 Chevrolet Tahoe, to the Monroe City Marshal's Office of the City of Monroe and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(b) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack seconded, by Ms. Woods and unanimously approved a Resolution No. 8428 authorizing the purchase of equipment for the Monroe Police Department off of State Contract and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Engineering Services:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Marshall seconded, by Ms. Woods and unanimously approved to consider a request from the Engineering Department for authorization from the City Council for an authorized City representative to advertise for bids for the Office of Motor Vehicles – Wall Repair Project. The DBE Goal is 10.43% and the source of funds is Insurance Reimbursement Funds. (There were no public comments.)

Mrs. Ezernack asked if someone could explain what kind of wall repair project.

Mayor Ellis stated someone was in the parking lot and backed into the wall. He said it's a repair to the exterior brick wall and framing.

(b) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack seconded, by Mr. Marshall and unanimously approved a Resolution No. 8429 authorizing a designated city representative to enter into a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement between the City of Monroe and the State of Louisiana Office of Facility Planning and Control for Young's Bayou Enhancement of Channel Capacity, Planning and Construction and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Citizen's Participation:

Mr. Tyrone Dickens, (K9), said they had a blues show on Sunday at the Monroe Civic Center. He said the Monroe Police Department and the staff at the Monroe Civic Center don't get enough credit, but they accommodated everyone. He said three hotels were packed, there was no drama, and the Monroe Civic Center generated money also. He said he partnered with some locals sponsors for Toy for Tots and they were able to give out toys in every neighborhood including Parkview, Trichell, Robinson Place, and Richwood. He said he is asking the City Council to take into consideration to team up with them to bring concerts back to the Monroe Civic Center. He said citizens should not have to go out of town for a concert experience and he has been voted promoter of the year five times in five different states just this year. He said he wants to be able to go directly to the Mayor. He said he would like to bring back Delta Fest to partner with the City to give citizens something to do and the community is pushing him to step forward. He noted they had the number 1 artist on the Billboard Chart and Monroe is always behind on everything.

Mr. Marty Campbell, SEDD, stated he wants to give the community the state of SEDD right now and there has been a lot of commotion about the Southside Economic Development District throughout the City. He said there have been a lot of lies and mistruths told, currently SEDD have board members that have intentionally and wrongfully given out misleading information concerning SEDD. He said they have continued to disregard the negative outcome that can affect SEDD that can disqualify and can even have SEDD shut down by the State if those actions continue. He stated they are not following the guidelines of State Law or of the Legislation that SEDD was created from and the TIF the Mayor offered could have been resolved a few months ago. He further stated because of their own selfish motive and political ambition to use SEDD as a political action committee against Council Chair Dawson, Councilman Marshall, and Mayor Ellis. He said they are using SEDD as a political vehicle to fight when it is wrong while the people of Districts 3,4, and 5 are continuing to suffer. He stated him being the oldest ranking member that sits on SEDD board, the current secretary, and former Chairman he emailed the City Attorney to freeze the assets of SEDD so that these individuals cannot illegally and wrongfully award contracts. He said the Penny Save Newspaper is keeping the African American community divided but really don't know the truth. He further stated he knows the truth because he has researched, studied, and asked questions to make sure they are in compliance with the law. He said as long as we keep fighting causing these problems Districts 3, 4, and 5 will continue to suffer. He said the only way to stop this problem is to have these individuals voted off of the board and the City Council have the power to remove these individuals. He said if not, we will have the same situation and he will be here week after week saying they are still fighting and having commotion, but it has to stop. He said he is tired of Mrs. Dawson being used as the face of the newspaper as if she is not for the black community and Mr. Marshall as if he is not supporting. He stated the Mayor wants Districts 3, 4, and 5 to have a TIF and be successful but when you have individuals on the board causing problems it makes the City as a whole look bad. He further stated we have to understand the truth, how SEDD works, how it is governed and do the right thing.

Mr. Charles Theus, 503 Speed Avenue, Executive Director of Southside Economic Development District, echoed the apology to Mrs. Gretchen from Mr. Marshall earlier in the meeting. He stated what you see with Mrs. Gretchen is what you get. He said civility is what you always get with Mrs. Gretchen, and he said they have not always agreed on things. He stated on behalf of the Southside Economic Development District from the Executive Director he humbly apologized to Mrs. Ezernack. He further stated SEDD is in the process of getting some things organized but it will take time. He said he is not saying it's irreversible but the longer they wait the more egregious the problems will be. He further noted SEDD have some great board members such as Mr. Tyrone Goodin, Mr. Sam Moore, and Mr. Preston Hopkins among others. He said they think the problem is something that can be solved but it will not resolve itself unless they make some hard decisions to put before the board. He stated he thinks the Monroe Chamber has agreed on a candidate and he is hoping the person will get approved. He further stated he hopes we don't start trying to cherry pick the choices that are made by the Chamber, and we need new leadership on the board. He said we need people who are going to look and work for progress. He noted as far as the budget for SEDD they have never been in the red. He said people have accused them of not spending any money but if they do the budget changes, they will be \$40,000 in the hole.

There being no further business to come before the council, the meeting was adjourned at 6:53 p.m., upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack and it was seconded by Mr. Marshall.

Mrs. Kema Dawson
Chairman

Carolus S. Riley
Council Clerk

Ileana Murray
Staff Secretary