

City Hall, Monroe, Louisiana
May 14, 2024
6:00 p.m.

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

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

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

There was absent: None.

Chairman Ezernack announced that a quorum was present, and that the Invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance would be led by Ms. Woods or her designee.

The Invocation was led by Bishop Rodney McFarland (Council Elect) Greater Free Gift Baptist Church.

COMMUNICATIONS & SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Mr. Harvey had no announcements.

Ms. Woods said good evening and it's good to see everyone. She thanked Bishop McFarland for the beautiful prayer, and she noted he is the Senior Pastor of the Greater Free Gift Baptist Church in Monroe. She recognized the Council Elect for District 4, Bishop Rodney McFarland and the Council Elect for District 5, Minister Verbon Muhammad. She thanked Bishop McFarland and Minister Muhammad for coming to the City Council meeting this evening. On another note, she stated for those who know former Councilman Kenneth Wilson to keep him in your prayers. She said he had an incident on Sunday, and he was not hospitalized but he did have to go to the hospital. She said she thinks he is home resting and she said he had promised to come to the Council meeting this evening, but he is not here. She further stated to keep him and his family in prayer.

Mr. Marshall said good evening to everyone, and he welcomed the Council Elect and the wonderful Black Chamber leaders. He said the Black Chamber are doing some great things and he is sure they have some announcements for the City. He thanked everyone for coming out to the City Council meeting.

Mrs. Dawson said good evening to everyone, and she announced "Bike for Hope" on Saturday May 18th at 8:00 am. She said it will start at the BJ Washington Recreation Center and the stops will include the Emily P. Robinson, Henrietta Johnson, and Benoit Recreation Center ending at the Monroe Civic Center. She noted this is being put on by the Monroe Police Department. She said from 4 p.m. until 6 p.m. at the Boys and Girls Club "Popsicles with Policeman" in Honor of Peace Officer Memorial Day at Powell Recreation Center on May 15th. On another note, she stated for senior citizen month there will be something special for the senior this Thursday at the Benoit Recreation Center at 4 p.m. She further stated Assistant Chief of Police Mary Tellis is spearheading this for the seniors and she noted to keep Assistant Chief Tellis in prayer because she lost her nephew today.

Mayor Friday Ellis said good evening to everyone and the Council Elect. He thanked everyone for attending tonight's Council meeting. He announced the splash pad at the Louisiana Purchase Gardens and Zoo is now open and he said it's always a popular exhibit at the Zoo. He said on Police Week the City had the Wreath Laying Ceremony and he thanked all the officers who have served and continue to serve and have paid the ultimate sacrifice in the line duty. He said the City had a great ceremony to honor their lives and commitment and their families lives and commitment to the City of Monroe. On another note, the Mayor noted the City is celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Zoo on June 1st at 11 a.m. and he said to come out and join the City. He said there will be some rebranding surprises and you will get to see some of the things that the Zoo society have going on. He further noted to keep Assistant Chief of Police Mary Ann Tellis and her family in your prayers as they go through this time. He said Chief Tellis came a few months ago to talk about involving seniors in our community and how to get them involved in relationships with police officers. He said to not only build that relationship but to also honor them and work

with events in the community centers. He stated Chief Tellis is doing a great job pulling this together and when you see her, give her lots of love and appreciation for the work they are doing. He further noted this event was at the Zoo, and they had over 96 seniors registered for the event. He said there is a laundry list of events that are happening right now with our seniors and to be sure to attend those events. Lastly, the Mayor announced “Picnic in the Park” is part of the Funroe series through multiple parks to get our communities engaged again with parks through family activities and small business vendors. He said it will be at Forsythe Park on Thursday May 23, 2024, from 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. He said they usually have movies and local vendors and he said it has been wonderful to be able to put these on and meet the public who attend. He reiterated to please keep Chief Tellis in your prayers and he said she is a wonderful lady and a great addition to the community. He said please pray for her as her family goes through this time.

Mrs. Ezernack welcomed the Councilmen Elect to tonight’s meeting and she said she is glad to see them in attendance. She noted she started off the year with what she felt like was her theme which is kindness, caring, and peace. She said we all know we can always be a little kinder, a little more caring, and promoted a lot more peace in our community, state, nation, and certainly in the world. On another note, she thanked the Monroe Police and she said this week honors them and she said we all know what they do for us putting their life on the line every day. She said she appreciates them and if you had to ever call them to your home or business you appreciate them as well. Lastly, she said she needs to read a Notice of Intent to Call Election for the record. She stated notice is hereby given in accordance with Section 19.1 of Title 42 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950, as amended, that the City Council acting as the governing authority (the **“Governing Authority”**), of the City of Monroe, State of Louisiana (the **“City”**) at its regularly scheduled meeting on June 11, 2024, at its regular meeting place, City Hall, 400 Lea Joyner Expressway, Monroe, Louisiana, at 6:00 p.m., will discuss and consider adopting an ordinance ordering and calling an election, to renew, continue, and/or rededicate the existing and future revenues from the one percent (1%) sales and use tax (the **“Tax”**) by: City Council of the City of Monroe, State of Louisiana for announcement and publication in the official journal.

Upon motion of Mrs. Dawson and seconded by Mrs. Ezernack, the minutes of the Legal and Regular session of April 23, 2024, were approved. (Mr. Harvey and Ms. Woods abstain. They were not present at the last meeting.) (There were no public comments.)

RESOLUTIONS AND MINUTE ENTRIES:

Department of Administration:

Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mrs. Dawson and unanimously approved to consider an Application by Alyco, LLC dba Love’s Travel Stop #806, 335 Hwy 594, Monroe LA 71203 for a New 2024 Class B Alcoholic Beverage Permit. The Monroe Police Department has no disqualifying records and Sales Tax has been approved. (Distance Report Cleared, Cert. of Occupy Cleared) (There were no public comments.)

Upon motion of Mrs. Dawson, seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved to consider an Application by James Goodin & Dan Keith dba Chukit Axe Games of Monroe, 1812 Tower Drive, Monroe LA 71203 for a New 2024 Class A Alcoholic Beverage Permit. The Monroe Police Department has no disqualifying records and Sales Tax has been approved. (Distance Report Cleared, Cert. of Occupy Cleared) (There were no public comments.)

Department of Public Works:

Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mrs. Dawson and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8707 accepting the Base Bid of D & J Construction Company, LLC in the amount of \$325,600.00 and Alternate Bid No. 1 in the amount of \$8,000.00, for the Runway Intersection Rehabilitation Project and authorizing a city representative to enter into and execute a contract for said work. (There were no public comments.)

Upon motion of Mrs. Dawson, seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8708 accepting the RFQ response of Architecture Associates, APC to provide architectural and engineering services for the Transit Center Relocation Project and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Ms. Woods stated she has been kind of out of the loop for a little bit and she wanted to have a little discussion about what is going on with this item. She noted the City has a RFQ (request for qualifications) with the new transit system center.

Mr. Marc Keenan, General Manager, noted the City is looking to put the new transit center at 600 DeSiard Street. He said it has been approved to purchase the land and the next step was to go out to bid for an architect and a designer.

Engineering Services:

Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mrs. Dawson and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8709 authorizing the City of Monroe to apply and provide matching funds for the Louisville Ave. & Washington St. Lamy Ln. Intersection and Sidewalk Project and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

INTRODUCTION OF RESOLUTIONS & ORDINANCES:

Upon motion of Mrs. Dawson, seconded by Mr. Marshall and unanimously approved to introduce an Ordinance re-dedicating revenues received from the licensing and taxing of video bingo operations and further providing with respect thereto. (Admin.)

Mr. Brandon Creekbaum, City Attorney, stated in the Council's packet was the Ordinance re-dedicating revenues received from the licensing and taxing of the video bingo operations. He said earlier today the City proposed a revision to the ordinance in the packet. He said in section 1 it says, "increases in salary" and "a payment of salary" in section 2. He further stated the revised ordinance now says in section 1 "increases in employee compensation" and in section 2 says "payment of employee compensation". He noted that change was in response and to clarify any confusion or misstatements related to what was being proposed. He said it was for potential employee compensation for all employees and not selected or a category of employees. He said they used a broader term to make clear that it was across the board and not for specific employees.

Mr. Rodney McFarland, 1017 Ouachita Avenue, wanted to clarify if this is an increase for all employees and what percentage.

Mr. Creekbaum said the Director of Administration can speak to the specific of any proposal, but this particular fund historically has not been able to be used for increases in compensation, salary, or wages. He stated the City is looking for ways to find packages to develop in union negotiations and other discussions with employees who are seeking increases in compensation and other areas. He said the City is trying to add as many tools to the tool belt for them to have options available when the time comes to increase compensation or when those negotiations are happening so they can respond to the needs of the employees. He further stated he doesn't think that this specific proposal is proposing any specific increase for any identifiable employee or select group of employees.

Mrs. Stacy Rowell, Director of Administration, noted this was originally written at a time when pension increases were kind of rising faster than what the City could keep up with. She said at the time the video bingo was coming into existence the former Director of Administration and the Administration decided this could be a reserve for when there might be some challenges in meeting those pension increases. She said that has been done in the past but now the City has kind of been able to manage those into the budget each year. She said the City is seeing this as an opportunity to possibly have this be a funding tool to maybe find some salary increases, wages increases, and compensation increases down the road. She said the City is always looking for pockets of money especially those that may be a recurring funding source. She said this one isn't much every year it's about \$300,000.00 a year, but every little bit that the City can put together to find some funding that gives those employees increases.

Mr. McFarland stated the only thing he is afraid of is that it will be a select few that will receive this increase. He wanted to know what is the minimum wage received in the City of Monroe.

Mrs. Rowell said she thinks right now the lowest is around \$10.00 an hour.

Mr. McFarland noted the City needs to try to get that up to at least \$14.00 an hour to be the lowest. He wanted to know how would the community know it will be fair across the board and it won't be a select few that will receive this increase.

Mr. Creekbaum noted typically compensation is most often discussed during union negotiations and the City right now are 5 separate unions. He said this particular pot of money has always excluded areas that have specific taxes already dedicated to it which a couple of the City's union do have taxes dedicated to them. He said for the broader ones these conversations happen at the

table are the result of mutual negotiations and typically have representatives from their national organizations. He noted it is a process the City goes through he thinks every two to three years with most unions and it's a product of arm length negotiations. He said everyone strives to get the best benefit of the bargain that they can get. He further noted having this tool in the tool belt especially when the City is having those discussions will be useful to the City in one of those ways they can do some of that give and take in the union negotiations that the City has become use too.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know when was the last time the City had an increase in minimum wage in the City of Monroe.

Mrs. Rowell stated \$10.00 is what the Council or the City has set as a minimum wage. She said as far as it being anything that sets it any higher she isn't aware of anything. She said \$10.00 is the lowest and that's actually probably just the City's part-time people and she said she believes everyone else right now are anywhere from \$11.00 or above as far as full-time employees.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know how he could receive the information of when was the last time minimum wage was raised, when the \$10.00 came into effect, and what year.

Mr. Creekbaum stated if that was a Council passed ordinance that would have been before his time. He further stated he can always get with the Council Clerk to research the information.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know how long Mr. Creekbaum has been with the City.

Mr. Creekbaum said he has been here five years.

Mr. McFarland stated that tells him that there is a dire need for an increase. He said if it is at \$10.00, and it has been \$10.00 for the last five plus years that is something he would like for the City to look at.

Mrs. Rowell noted this ordinance is a piece of trying to find that fund money and it desperately needs to be raised.

Mr. Creekbaum noted to reiterate Mrs. Rowell he thinks the minimum wage applies mostly to the part-time employees.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know if that is in writing anywhere about the wages and if someone can send it to him.

Mrs. Ezernack noted in the budget.

Mr. Harvey wanted clarification whether it would be in the Union Contact.

Mr. Creekbaum wanted to know in what form and if he is asking who is making what.

Mr. McFarland said yes.

Mr. Creekbaum said the City can get him that.

Mrs. Ezernack said it may be a good idea for Bishop McFarland to schedule an appointment with Mr. Creekbaum and Mrs. Rowell for them to shed a whole lot of light on that and get him some historical documentation. She said they will be able to share that with him and she thinks that would be very helpful. She noted Mr. Verbon Muhammad may wish to do that too.

Mr. McFarland stated he will definitely give them a call because tonight is just the first reading if that is correct.

Mrs. Ezernack noted this is not awarding anyone any money and it is a dedicated fund expanding that the City will be able to use for that purpose when the time arises.

Mr. McFarland stated the City may need to put some more teeth in this and what he is hearing from the City he is not satisfied. He said maybe when he sits down and have a conversation with the City and come back to the next Council meeting they can have more dialogue on this matter.

Ms. Woods said it is her understanding that the money the City gets from the video poker goes into two pots.

Mr. Creekbaum said that is correct.

Ms. Woods noted one is for employee benefits and the other one is for capital purchases. She wanted to know typically on the capital purchases what does that look like.

Mrs. Rowell stated in the past the City basically gathers up a list of needs garbage trucks usually took the “lion” share of it. She said garbage trucks, trash trucks, or any other type of equipment that might be needed. She said generally the City would put together a packet and the City would go out basically to borrow the money. She stated the City would buy a lot of equipment at one time and then pay that debt off and this is the magnesium that pays that debt which usually about a five year lease.

Ms. Woods said she heard Mrs. Rowell say typically about \$300,000.00 goes into the employee portion of it from the taxes and licensing. She wanted to know how much typically goes into the debt fund and if it is about the same.

Mr. Creekbaum stated it is split equally.

Mrs. Ezernack stated up until the last few years it hasn’t been generating the amount of money if she remembers correctly and it has kind of increased over time.

Mrs. Rowell said it comes and goes especially with covid it went down as low as 200 something thousand a year. She said at one time when it was something new it was about \$400,000.00 a year but it settle around \$300,000.00 a year.

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

The Chairman open the public hearing and seeing no one come forward the hearing was closed.

Upon motion of Mrs. Dawson, seconded by Mr. Marshall and unanimously approved Ordinance No. 12,218 approving a lease between the City of Monroe and Oakwell Commuter Rail LLC at the Monroe Regional Airport and further providing with respect thereto. (Airport) (There were no public comments.)

Ms. Woods noted she talked to Legal about this today but for the sake of those at home and those here in the audience she would like to shed some light on what the City is doing here and how the City could potentially benefit.

Mr. Brandon Creekbum, City Attorney, stated he gets the pleasure of speaking on behalf of Mr. Charles Butcher, Airport Director, who is not present tonight, but he was involved in these lease negotiations. He said the City is excited to announce, if this lease is approved by Council, will be to bring in an established and reputable group who are familiar Oakwell Commuter Rails. He said they are familiar with airports and the service industry. He said he thinks they service commuter rails, transportation centers, hotels, and also airports. He said they are currently in the Lafayette airport, but he is not sure if they are in any other Louisiana airports. He further stated the proposed lease is to open up or reopen the restaurant, bar, and the gift shop that is on the front side of the terminal, and they are going to press to have it open by the end of June or early July. He said on the secured side pass transportation where there historically has not been any options for food or service they have plans to build out a kiosk to service coffee, drinks, small food, and snacks. He said that is going to be a little later because there is some small build out they have to do, and he was told somewhere around August maybe a little bit into September. He noted it is a 7 year lease and the lease is one that is kind of familiar to airport concessions. He said it establishes a minimum annual guarantee, so the City is guaranteed a minimum revenue each year from the lease of the space and the City also get a percentage of the sales and he thinks it’s 15% of alcohol and 8% of the food items sold. He said if that 15% and 8% exceeds the minimum annual guarantee the City will get that amount too.

Ms. Woods wanted to know what the minimum manual lease guarantee would be.

Mr. Creekbaum stated the minimum manual guarantee is \$20,000 a year.

Mrs. Ezernack said it would be nice to have those services back for people that are traveling or waiting on travelers to arrive as well. She said especially behind the security area.

Ms. Wood thanked the City for the work they put into this, and she said she knows the City has tried to have a number of restaurants. She thanked the City for going in and trying to solidify this and she said hopefully the next thing is to bring another airline to increase the traffic in the airport.

Citizen's Participation:

(1.) Mr. Rodney McFarland, 1017 Ouachita Avenue, thanked God for the opportunity to come before the Council and he said he came tonight because of the word in the community that some are uneasy about the new Council Elect. He stated he wanted the Council to rest assure that the Council elect are not coming on the Council to tear down the Council, the Mayor, the City, or stop projects. He said they are coming to represent the people of their district and to be a voice for the people. He further stated he wanted the Mayor to know all the lies that was stated about the color of his skin was not true. He noted they will work together, and he said he tells his congregation anything looks better together even if you have two teeth they look better together. He further noted they will work together as one for the betterment of this City. He said their districts will be well represented and he said he looks forward to July 1st to take office and to begin great work. He commended Mr. Marshall for everything he has done and is still doing. He stated he is a true gentleman and he thanked Mr. Marshall for his service on the Monroe City Council. He further stated he is looking forward to sitting down with the Mayor to have a conversation.

(2.) Mr. Curtis S. Garth, 2300 Georgia Street, said he came to find out what is the status of a request he made to the City of Monroe and the Council on March 8, 2021. He said for you all that don't know the State of Louisiana has been blessed by the Lord God Almighty and himself. He said they made 60 trillion dollars, and they don't have a penny of it. He said it can be found on case number 992831 and the arbitration cases.

Mrs. Ezernack said she thinks to be able to find that status he would have to speak with Mr. Creekbaum, and she thinks he could call him or come to his office to discuss. She said she doesn't think the Council can answer that question for him tonight.

Mr. Garth asked to be treated with respect.

(3.) Ms. Kenya Roberson, 116 Greenwood Drive, stated she came on behalf of her organization BBOU (Black Business Owner United), and she said each year for the last five years they had an annual black expo as well as the Best of the Ark-La-Miss. She said God has truly shown up and shown out and she said normally they would have 20 to 30 vendors for the expo this year they have 100 vendors. She said with the Best of the Ark-La-Miss they normally have fifty categories but this year they have sixty-four categories. She stated they normally have an attendance anywhere between 250 to 300 but this year they have 420 people. She further stated God is good and she said it is her prayer that they get some help from the City to pump this up. She said it is this Friday and Saturday free to the public and all their money can be utilized with the vendors. She noted it is from 11 a.m. until 7 p.m. on Friday to allow people who are working to be able to get off and shop with the vendors. She further noted the gala is unfortunately sold out, but she wanted to make sure the City understands the impact that something to this magnitude has in the community. She said often times our organizations and businesses don't get the flowers they deserve, yeah you get money but it's hard. She said this may be the only opportunity that they are recognized. She said if you didn't get tickets to the gala or table certainly come to the expo Friday.

The being no further business to come before the council, the meeting was adjourned at 6:41 p.m., upon motion of Mr. Harvey and it was seconded by Mr. Marshall.

Mrs. Gretchen Ezernack
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.

