

City Hall, Monroe, Louisiana
March 14, 2023
6:00p.m.

The Honorable Chairman Kema Dawson, 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 Dawson announced that a quorum was present, and that the Invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance would be led by her designee.

The Invocation was led by Pastor Marty Campbell

COMMUNICATIONS & SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Mrs. Ezernack welcomed everyone to the City Council meeting, and she said it is nice to see the Wossman Wildcat women in the Council's presence tonight. She congratulated the Lady Wildcats and said there is probably more to come. She stated some may or may not know the Council has started a new initiative for small business of the month in each District. She said tonight's small business of the month for District 2 is CiCi's Coffee located at 2350 Tower Drive Monroe, LA.

(Mr. Harvey entered at the Council meeting at 6:02pm)

Ms. Woods said good evening to everyone, and it is good to see everyone. She congratulated the Wossman Wildcats Ladies on their accomplishment, and she is sure there is more to come as well. She said she doesn't have a lot of announcements today but the small business of the month for District 3 is L&L Auto Service located at 1919 Desiard Street, owner Mr. Darnell Coleman. She further announced Mr. William Augusta Horne, a pillar in the Booker T. Community, passed away and he was funeralized this past Saturday. She said he leaves to mourn his passing a beautiful, spirited wife Mrs. Rosie B. Horne and if you know her just tell her hello.

Mr. Marshall said good evening to everyone and thanked everyone for coming out. He echoed the councilmembers in congratulating the Lady Wildcats on their back-to-back championship. He thanked everyone for coming out to the Daddy Daughter Dance 2023. He said it was a great success and there were hundreds of kids and their dads dancing and having fun. He stated there have been a lot of conversations on crime but no matter how many police the City have on the streets if we don't get to the why, the cycle will be repeated. He said we can have conversations on how many cops we have but until we start putting our dollars into resources to help kids, families, and schools we will be repeating a cycle. He further stated it is uncommon, but we have to do the uncommon to get things done. He thanked Choosing Independence for coming to the City of Monroe this past weekend and he said they have been trying to get their project off the ground of 36 houses for ownership in South Monroe. On another note, Mr. Marshall announced the small business of the month for District 4 Head Mechanix Grooming Lounge at 122 South Grand Street, owner Mr. Kerrico Holmes.

Mrs. Dawson stated tonight the small business of the month for District 5 is Eddie Clark & Associates located at 1001 Century Blvd, owner Mr. Eddie Clark. She also stated tonight she would like to do the honor of recognizing the Wossman High School Lady Wildcats with a proclamation for winning the Louisiana High School Athletic Associates (LHSAA) Division 2 State Basketball Tournament on March 4, 2023. She said it is with great pride to recognize the Wossman High School Lady Wildcats Varsity basketball team for their victory at the State Championship and serving as role models for students and citizens across our City and State. She further stated on behalf of Mayor Friday Ellis, the Monroe City Council, and citizens of Monroe she commend the Lady Wildcats varsity basketball team and hereby proclaim March 14, 2023, as Wossman High School LHSAA Division 2 State Champions Day. She congratulated the Carroll High School basketball team and Wossman High School boys' basketball team for making it to the finals and she said we are looking forward to them bringing home a championship next year.

Mayor Friday Ellis said the City of Monroe made national news last Friday when Amtrak made the announcement that they will be joining the City of Monroe Southern Rail Commission

partnership. He said this is the first time in 25 years that Amtrak will be opening a new route. He said this is a catalytic project as we all understand how the workforce has changed and how it connects the City to Atlanta and Dallas. He said in the next coming days the City will be hearing from the Surface Transportation Board that the merger between KCS and Canadian Pacific will happen which is a big deal. He also noted the Parks and Recreation Master Plan will be finished and the City will introduce these projects to our citizens. Mayor Ellis announced a partnership with Energy to prioritize LED lighting for lighter and brighter communities which was a need in our community to lighten neighborhoods. On another note, the Mayor stated he attended Read the Day Away at Carver Elementary School and Sallie Humble Elementary School along with City staff, Monroe Police Department, and Monroe Fire Department. He congratulated the Flying Tiger on the opening of the Victory Pizza Lab which is another great addition to the City. Mayor Ellis made note of those who attended the Martin Luther King Day Salute who had a chance to witness a performance put on by the Grambling State Choir that was beautiful, and it moved a lot of folks. He presented the Grambling State University Choir with a proclamation deeming it an honor and a privilege to recognize the Grambling State University Choir under the direction of Mr. Cordara Harper for their contribution to our community and hereby proclaim Tuesday March 14, 2023, as Grambling State University Choir Day.

Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack, seconded by Mr. Marshall the minutes of the Legal and Regular Session of February 28, 2023, were approved. (Mr. Harvey abstained he was not present at the last meeting) (There were no public comments.)

PROPOSED CONDEMNATIONS:

The following condemnations were removed from the agenda:

(1) 803 Bethune (D5) (Owner – Frankie Cloman) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved to remove this item because the owner has demolished the property and cleaned the lot. (There were no public comments.)

The following condemnations were considered:

(2) 705 Reed (D4) (Owner Javance E. Jones) Notice to show cause was served. There was no one present. Photographic evidence was presented. Upon motion of Mr. Marshall, seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved, the building was condemned, and the property owner was 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. Tommy James, Code Enforcement Officer, stated this is an unsafe dilapidated structure, with excessive obnoxious growth and accumulated items. He stated they have made contact with the property owner and advised her of the City's intent.

Mr. Marshall wanted to know if the property owner was present.

Mr. James said he doesn't know if Ms. Jones is present but he advised Ms. Jones he would ask the Council to give her 30 days and condemn the property and bring the structure into compliance with the code. He further stated Ms. Jones said she would demolish the property herself.

Mr. Marshall motion to condemn the property giving the owner 30 days to rid the property of all debris and obnoxious growth with further respect thereto.

(3) 607 Wilson Street (D5) (Owner – Gloria Magee) Notice to show cause was served. There was no one present. Photographic evidence was presented. Upon motion of Mrs. Dawson, seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved, the building was condemned, and the property owner was given 90 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 a dilapidated structure and it burnt in 2015. He said he has spoken to Ms. Magee who has a strong desire to build her property back. He said Ms. Magee started replacing widows but she had some issues. They are asking that the property be condemned, and the owner given 90 days.

Mrs. Dawson stated since Mr. James has been working with the property owner, she is fine with giving Ms. Magee 90 days. She motion to condemn the property giving the owner 90 days in which to bring the structure into compliance with the Code or demolish the Structure and clean the lot.

ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION OF BIDS:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8471 accepting the bid of Michael Dewayne Wilson, in the amount of \$76,554.00 for the 808 North 33rd Street Home Rehabilitation Project, and further authorizing an authorized city representative, to enter into and execute a contract for said services. (There were no public comments.)

RESOLUTIONS AND MINUTE ENTRIES:

Council

(a) Upon motion of Ms. Woods seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8472 recognizing the month of June as Juneteenth Celebration Month in the City of Monroe and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Ms. Woods thanked the Juneteenth team and she said they had a great time last year and they are looking forward to having an even better time this year. She said Juneteenth is a celebration everybody wants to be apart of and she is thankful to the City for considering this to be a month long celebration which allows everyone to have some input.

Department of Administration:

(a) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved to Consider an Application by Zhengquan Zhang dba The Mighty Crab, Inc., 4101 Pecanland Mall Dr., Monroe LA 71201 for a Renewal 2023 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.)

(b) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved to Consider an Application by Mario Mata dba Papi Loco Taco Shop, 523 DeSiard St., Monroe LA 71201 for a New 2023 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.)

(c) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved to Consider an Application by AFAQ3 LLC dba HOP IN, 301 Louisville Ave., Monroe LA 71201 for a New 2023 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.)

ADD-ON: Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved to add item (d) to the agenda to Consider an Application by Makaria Atkins dba Sidelines Sports Lounge, 227 Desiard St., Monroe LA 71201 for a New 2023 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.)

Ms. Woods said just for clarification purposes she wanted to know why the Council is adding this application to the agenda and what is the rush.

Mr. Harvey stated he thinks the owners are present and he asked them to come to the podium to tell the public where they are in the process and their reason for the rush to get this item on the agenda.

Mr. Dustin Underwood said he is trying to be open for St. Patrick's Day because it is a big celebration for this type of venue.

Mr. Harvey wanted to know what kind of business Mr. Underwood owns.

Mr. Underwood said it is a sports lounge.

Ms. Woods wanted to know if Mr. Underwood was a little late getting his paperwork done and why it couldn't be put on the last agenda.

Mr. Underwood stated their plumber had a heart attack doing work and it put them 4 weeks behind. He said the plumber is fine, but they were trying to be open for Super Bowl Sunday but getting a plumber after the freeze the City had was not good.

(d) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey seconded by Mr. Marshall and unanimously approved to Consider an Application by Makaria Atkins dba Sidelines Sports Lounge, 227 Desiard St., Monroe LA 71201 for a New 2023 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.)

Legal Department:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8473 stating the City of Monroe's Endorsement of Hotel Monroe Holdings, LLC and their Project #20140898-RTA to participate in the benefits of the Louisiana Restoration Tax Abatement Program. (There were no public comments.)

There being no objection from the Council and before moving to the next item on the agenda the Chairman asked the representative from Head Mechanix GL to come forward to receive the award for being the small business of month for District 4. Head Mechanix GL was not present at the beginning of the meeting when the Council gave out awards.

(b) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8474 stating the City of Monroe's Endorsement of Hotel Monroe Holdings, LLC and their Project #20140899-RTA to participate in the benefits of the Louisiana Restoration Tax Abatement Program. (There were no public comments.)

Department of Community Affairs:

(a) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8475 authorizing a designated city representative to execute an Animal Transfer Agreement transferring three (3) Brown Tufted Capuchins from the University of Louisiana System to the City of Monroe, to be utilized at the Louisiana Purchase Gardens & Zoo, and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Ms. Woods stated she would like for someone to tell us what the City has going on with this item because she thought it was a nice story.

Ms. Lisa Taylor, General Curator, said the University of Lafayette reached out to the zoo about a research facility they have with some capuchin monkeys from South America. She said they were not involved in any kind of research, and they needed to surplus them out. She stated they have been in cages their entire life and the zoo is given the opportunity to take them in and put them on display to represent their species in the community. She further stated they needed to get clarification for their insurance to be able to sign the contract with the university to take full responsibility for these primates at the zoo's facility.

Engineering Services:

(a) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8476 authorizing a designated city representative to execute Change Order No. Nine (9) for the Water Treatment Plant Renovation and Expansion, between the City of Monroe and Max Foote Construction Company for an increase in the contract amount by \$194,700.82 and an additional 64 calendar days and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(b) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey seconded by Mr. Marshall and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8477 accepting as substantially complete work done by and between City of Monroe and Womack and Sons Construction Group, LLC for Young's Bayou Retention Area, and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(c) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved to Consider request from the Engineering Department for Council approval for an authorized City representative to advertise for bids for the WPCC Ultraviolet Disinfection Facility Replacement

project. The engineer's estimate is \$1,592,000.00. The DBE Goal is 14.41% and the source of funds is the Capital Fund. (There were no public comments.)

Ms. Woods wanted to know if the item is to advertise for bids.

Mr. Charles Westrom, Sewer Manager, said yes.

Ms. Woods said, for the sake of those at home she asked Mr. Westrom to talk about the ultraviolet disinfectant facility.

Mr. Westrom said the UV System is the disinfection process at the plant and they are upgrading it to a new modern system that will use less electricity and be more reliable than the aging system that is there now.

Ms. Woods wanted to know the estimated cost.

Mr. Westrom said about a million and six.

Ms. Woods said that is the amount the City has allocated for this project, and she sees the money is coming from the Capital Funds with a DBE goal of 14.4 %.

Mr. Westrom thanked the Council for supporting this project.

INTRODUCTION OF RESOLUTIONS & ORDINANCES:

(a) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved to Introduce an Ordinance adopting a Budget of Revenues and providing for an estimate of items and expenditures for the fiscal year 2023-2023 (Admin) (There were no public comments.)

(b) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved to Introduce an Ordinance adopting a Capital Improvements Program for the City of Monroe and providing for detailed statement of the contents for a five (5) year period from May 1, 2023, to April 30, 2028 (Admin.) (There were no public comments.)

(c) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey seconded by Mr. Marshall and unanimously approved to Introduce an Ordinance authorizing Mayor Friday Ellis to sign all documents in connection with the acquisition of properties related to State Project No. H.013972 – Youngs Bayou Detention Pond, Ouachita Parish and further providing with respect thereto. (Eng.) (There were no public comments.)

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

The Chairman opened the Public Hearing and seeing no one come forward the Hearing was closed.

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mr. Marshall and unanimously approved an Ordinance No. 12,149 authorizing Mayor Friday Ellis to enter into an option to Lease and License Agreement with Silicon Ranch Corporation for 223.06 acres of property located at the Monroe Regional Airport and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

The Chairman opened the Public Hearing.

(b) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mr. Marshall and unanimously approved an Ordinance No. 12,150 authorizing Mayor Friday Ellis to enter into a Purchase Option Agreement with Silicon Ranch Corporation for 306.3 acres of property located on Millhaven Road and further providing with respect thereto. (Mayor)

Ms. Woods said she is happy someone is here because she does have questions because they would be located in District 3 which is her district.

Mr. Stefan Eckmann, Silicon Ranch Senior Manager, stated they are still in the early staging of this project, and they have submitted an application for interconnection with Entergy which will be a four-year development cycle. He said the first step would be approval of land to be able to proceed to later due diligence. He said they build, own, and operate the projects and they go in with the full intent on operating these projects for 40 years. He noted they are involved in 16 states across the US and have over 2,000 megawatts of energy through over 150 operating projects. He further noted the cost of the project being proposed is 80 megawatts which is approximately an

80-million-dollar capital investment and 530 acres which will be within the City of Monroe through a lease and purchase.

Ms. Gina Brown, Director, Economic and Community Development, said a lot of communities are focused on bringing jobs and investments. She said they are heavy on the investment, but solar facilities don't require a handful of full-time jobs therefore the job recreation comes in the construction period. She noted a project of this size is estimated to create 200 to 300 construction jobs for about a year. She further noted another economic driver is the tax generation that goes straight back to the City. She said they will be able to provide a model of what the tax structure looks like as they move forward in the project.

Mr. Eckmann said the preliminary site plan shows about 800 acres under option but about less than 500 acres will actually be used solar panel. He said it starts North of the soccer fields of Chennault Park and the City of Monroe lease would be North of the Monroe Regional Airport.

Ms. Woods said this is really exciting just in the construction phase 200 to 300 jobs for a year and afterwards about five full-time employees.

Mr. Eckmann said probably about five to seven employees and it will be jobs for electricians' vegetative management. He said they use sheep to maintain the grass to keep it low, but they haven't looked into this part of the country to see if sheep grazing is liable.

Ms. Woods wanted to know what part of Louisiana they are located in now.

Ms. Brown stated they are not in Louisiana, but their headquarters are in Nashville, TN.

Ms. Woods wanted to know if they have any solar panels in Louisiana.

Ms. Brown said they do not.

Mr. Harvey wanted to clarify if they have solar panels in Southern Arkansas.

Ms. Brown said they do have one in Arkansas but the one in Louisiana would have probably been under development.

Mayor Ellis stated the project the City witness was out of Jackson, TN.

Ms. Brown said the Mayor is referring to the Yum-Yum facility, which is not their solar facility, but they do have others in Tennessee.

Mr. Eckmann said they do have one in Southern Arkansas with Aerojet Rocketdyne.

Mr. Marshall wanted to know if the energy is only for commercial and industrial properties or is it available for residential as well.

Mr. Eckmann said Entergy would dictate how the power is used and if there were a large customer base that would like to receive their energy from a removal able energy source, they can enter into a contract to get power from a certain project.

Ms. Woods wanted to know what would be a reason Silicon Ranch wouldn't do business with the City.

Mr. Eckmann stated the longest wait time would be the transmission process with Entergy where they go through a series of studies to determine what the impact would be putting that much power on to the grid which can take 3 to 4 years.

Ms. Woods stated there was another company that came looking to bring solar to the City and then all of sudden it fizzled out. She further stated she doesn't know what happened with that or how far the City got with the studies, but she is excited about this and wanted to know what would be a deterrent.

Mr. Eckmann said the biggest piece would be the transmission process coming back to say their studies are wrong and it would be more expensive and cost prohibitive to get onto the grid.

Ms. Brown stated that they see Economic Development as a driver in the projects that we do and knowing that the number of jobs that they create are not long term they do look for ways to be part of the community beyond just writing checks. She said they look to partner with schools and organizations, and they are welcome to the City's suggestions.

Ms. Woods stated the area Silicon Ranch is going to be located there is an underserved elementary school therefore that would be perfect.

The Chairman closed the Public Hearing seeing no one come forward.

The Chairman opened the Public Hearing.

(c) Upon motion of Mr. Marshall, seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved an Ordinance No. 12,151 amending and adjusting the City of Monroe Operating Budget for fiscal year 2022-2023 (Admin.)

Ms. Kenya Roberson, 116 Glenwood, wanted to know if the City employee's salaries are included in this budget.

Mrs. Ezernack stated this is an amendment to the current budget, this not the new budget.

The Chairman closed the Public Hearing seeing no one else come forward.

The Chairman opened the Public Hearing.

(d) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mr. Marshall and approved an Ordinance No. 12,152 changing the salary of the Council Members of the City of Monroe and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

The Chairman closed the Public Hearing seeing no one come forward.

Mrs. Ezernack said she would like to state her position on this Ordinance before the Council gets into the vote. She stated she will not be able to support this particular item because the City just went through the budget hearing talking about projecting deficits and things of that nature. She said she doesn't want the salary of the council members who were elected to impede future services for the City of Monroe citizens or the salaries for those citizens as well. She said people are struggling and what is going on in the world today economically we don't know if we can continue to have our sales tax revenues and property value may fall which are our main sources of income. She said personally she has thought about this a lot, and she knows some constituents have supported this but for her she doesn't think she will be able to support it at this time.

Mrs. Stacy Rowell, Director of Administration, wanted to be clear that on the introduction of the budget they presented 2023-2024 there is no deficit projected.

Mrs. Ezernack stated the City has talked about having some in the past therefore they don't know what the future will hold, and it is a four-year commitment to an increase.

Mrs. Rowell said it wouldn't be impacting the 2023-2024 it would be an impact in the next years budget.

Mrs. Ezernack noted when council members run for office, they knew what the salary would be, and they all have full-time employment, part time employment, or other means of support. She further noted she didn't do it for the money but she ran for office to give back to the community which she has lived in her entire life. She said we would all like to have more money but it's not very practical at this particular time for her.

Ms. Woods stated she would like to speak and give her position on it as well. She said it is amazing Mrs. Ezernack feels basically the same way she does. She said she is at the point right now she is actually paying to serve on the Council and the check she receives goes back into the community. She said she didn't get a lot of calls but the ones she did get hit her in the heart. She said just before she came into the meeting, she was talking to someone that stated the Council is going to take a 50% increase and there are people working on the back of a garbage truck and the Council

will make more money than them. She said the person further stated the Council only meets twice a month in an air conditioned building and they are on the street. She further stated she was coming in to think to support it but when she got that phone call she thought about it. She said when she took this job, she knew exactly what she was getting into, and she will continue to serve. She said she is fine with it but personally she is not going to be able to support it either.

Mr. Marshall said he understands where each council member is coming from and he doesn't do it for the money either but he knows he puts a lot of time, effort, and gas into what he does for the City. He said he spends a lot of time in the community, and he is constantly going to meetings, checking on properties, answering phone calls, and going to people's houses throughout the week. He said it is not about the Council but its about the seats of those they are representing in the future and there is a lot that has transpired over the years. He said we have to consider inflation which plays a large part and they have jobs but those salaries sustain their families and livelihoods. He said he is not saying this is to sustain that, but the Council puts a lot of this back into the community. He said there is a lot that goes on and if you are not out there you wouldn't know what is going on but he said he sees it from both sides.

Mrs. Dawson stated some Council members meet more than two meetings a month and some are in the community every week. She said the Council get phone calls every day even though they have Council employees. She said the Council go out to crime scenes, accidents, fires, funerals, and spend gas to go out to other Districts to take care of issues. She further stated for some Council members this is the only income because unfortunately not everyone has a full-time job. She further stated she understands where the Council is coming from, and a lot of the money does go back into the community whether it's from the City Council check or their time which they are not actually getting paid for because in everybody's mind the Council is getting paid for two meetings a month and that's not the case.

(Mr. Marshall, Mr. Harvey, and Mrs. Dawson voted aye) (Mrs. Ezernack voted nay.)

Ms. Woods wanted to be absolutely clear that they said two meetings a month and Madam Chairman is right the Council spend a lot of time in the community doing a lot of things. She said when she gets off one job, she goes to the next one and with that being said she voted nay.

Mrs. Dawson noted this raise will not go into effect for the current Council members but for whoever is elected in the next Council election.

The Chairman opened the Public Hearing.

(e) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mr. Marshall and approved an Ordinance No. 12,153 changing the salary of the Mayor of the City of Monroe and further providing with respect thereto. (Ms. Woods & Mrs. Ezernack nay)

Ms. Kenya Roberson, 116 Glenwood, said she received a lot of calls and emails in reference to the last Council meeting when she stated she thinks a raise is due, but her issue is the amount. She said she really appreciates what Councilwoman Ezernack said because that is key. She said the people that make the City of Monroe, the Mayor, and the Council look great are underpaid. She said they go out tirelessly and leave their families and go out sometimes before we even wake up. She said all she is asking from the Mayor and the City Council is to look at the people who are left out and the people who can't get their own raise. She said they can't come to the podium because they don't want to be singled out and they don't want to stand before the Council to beg and plead for a raise, but they rely on people such as herself. She said she has sat in these Council meetings and the City has moved money around for many things but why not move money around for the City workers. She said how about the City table the Mayor's salary and have an all inclusion for the City workers. She said she knows what the Council and Mayor does, and she isn't saying they don't deserve a raise, but she doesn't feel it is right to ask that the Council vote for a raise of this amount of money and tomorrow they have people who are doing the work for them on a day to day basis. She said you can give them certificates, but they need it in their checks they have families that they are having to feed.

Mr. Christopher Orange said he disagrees with Mrs. Ezernack respectively, but he has been to other cities, and he knows when you bring resources to the table you have to be rewarded. He said he doesn't believe the Mayor's salary has been changed since 2003 even though he wasn't living here then. He said months ago the Mayor presented 220 million allocated to Districts 3, 4, and 5

from the infrastructure bill by the federal government and brought it to this small City of Monroe. He stated for 19 years with the previous Mayor roads weren't being fixed, Amtrak was not invited here, and there were very few incentives to come do business in the City of Monroe. He said if the City is not happy with what the Mayor has done in 23 months, they can put someone else there, but he sees progress and that needs to be rewarded whether the Mayor takes the money or not its up to you.

Mr. Michael Castor said he was the vice President for the local union for 9 and half years and the employees do need their money. He wanted to know what happened to the covid money and he said the City was supposed to go back to the table for that, but it didn't happen. He said he understands they are all about budgets, but the City always finds money to do everything else. He said to take care of your people and the Council and Mayor deserve a raise, but they should take care of their people first. He said he was a part of Gallagher, and he knew what was supposed to be paid but it wasn't.

Ms. Marie Brown, 1002 South 5th, said she does think the City Council need a raise and if the Council can afford not to have 10 to 15 jobs, they can put it out there for good people to come and do this work. She said she would like someone who doesn't have 2 to 3 jobs trying to do the work and that would require people that are at retirement age or at a great income already. She said because this Administration will not be getting this raise the community has an opportunity to keep this Administration or vote them out. She said raising the salary of the Mayor may attract highly educated people or people who are willing to do serious work. She noted she also believes no employee of the City with a full-time, part-time, or seasonal position should earn less than \$13 an hour and be on a path to \$15 dollars hour over the next two years.

The Chairman closed the Public Hearing seeing no one else come forward.

Mrs. Ezernack said this is another item that has been very difficult to work through, and she knows the Mayor's position is 24 hours a day seven days a week and she agrees with some of the comments that have been made as well but some of her concerns are sustainably for the future and what does that do to the services the Council provides and our people. She wanted to know if she could make an amendment.

Mrs. Angie Sturdivant, City Attorney, stated Mr. Harvey already made the motion.

Mrs. Ezernack wanted to know if she could amend the motion.

Mrs. Dawson said Mr. Harvey would have to withdraw his motion.

Mr. Harvey stated he has no intention of withdrawing his motion unless there is something the Council agrees upon in totality ahead of time.

Mrs. Ezernack said she just thinks it needs to be less than what they are proposing and even if the Council could agree on \$20,000. She said it is a four-year commitment and that is substantial amount over that period of time for this economy. She said once again when we ran for office, they knew what the salary and benefits which she thinks is a nice compromise.

Mrs. Sturdivant said that would be a substantial amendment therefore they would not be able to vote on that tonight because you would be cutting the proposed raise in half.

Mrs. Ezernack said at this point she would just have to vote against it.

Mrs. Dawson said this was brought up years ago and for the same reasons it was not voted upon. She said when you are looking at your job most companies allow for a yearly raise and this raise has not been given in twenty years. She said when you work hard you want to be rewarded for it and the current Council members will not see any of the raise unless they are re-elected.

Mrs. Stacey Rowell, Director of Administration, said they ran the numbers after the last meeting and a 2% raise for last year would have been about 46.8%, she thinks. She said not everybody gets a 2% and some years the City has given more than that and some less but over 20 year period that adds up.

Mrs. Dawson wanted to clarify because she asked this question at the last meeting if they would have given a 2% raise to the Mayor's salary every year for 20 years it would be higher than what is being request right now.

Mr. Harvey said yes, he did the math and if the City did 2% every year it would end up higher than where they are right now. He said the City has done more than 5% in other positions, which doesn't mean you're finished but there is still work to be done. He said he hires people to manage budgets larger than this and you're not going to get it for \$90,000 or \$130,000 a year. He said the reality is if you want good people in these positions long term the City will have to pay them.

Ms. Woods said she appreciates what Councilman Harvey said but when you take these position you know what they pay. She said she believes a raise is in order, however she is one who believes it should be done incrementally. She said if the City wants to give a \$40,000 raise over the next year why not give half and then give the other half and would still accomplish getting to the \$40,000.

Mrs. Rowell said it has taken 20 years to do this increment and there hasn't been incremental given in 20 years and that is part of the problem.

Mr. Harvey said no one wants to vote for politicians' pay raises.

Ms. Woods said she understands that, and no one wants to vote for it doing an election year.

Mrs. Dawson stated the Council could have discussed this months ago when they first started talking about it.

Ms. Woods said she guess the thing is the Mayor will still get \$40,000 within the four year period of time.

Mrs. Rowell said it would have to come before a new council and they would have to vote on that again and we would go through the same arguments again.

Ms. Woods stated not if the Council puts it in the Ordinance.

Mrs. Rowell stated she doesn't think it could be put in the Ordinance if it could be amended or not.

Mrs. Sturdivant said splitting the raise she believes that would be a substantial amendment as well.

Ms. Woods wanted to know if the Council is within a time frame to bring it back and do everything to get it in place to be in effect for July 2024.

Mrs. Sturdivant stated it can't be within one year of the last term according to the City charter.

Mrs. Dawson stated the Council's election was pushed back due to Covid and it will be earlier next year.

Ms. Woods said it will be in March.

Mr. Harvey said the election will be early April or late March.

Ms. Woods wanted to clarify if the Council doesn't pass now, it can't happen this term.

Mr. Harvey said it won't happen for another year plus and it will affect the next Council members.

Mr. Marshall wanted to know if the Council could retract the vote. He said the Council definitely need a raise but there is a lot of uncertainty. He said he thinks the Council needs to have a conversation and come back.

Mrs. Sturdivant said that maybe the issue that the Council can't come back until another four years from now. She further stated the next election is at the end of March and the Council's next meeting is March 28th and she thinks the next election is March 26th.

Mr. Harvey noted the raise percentage is worth about 0.7% of the City's operating budget and the Council is arguing over pennies.

Ms. Wood wanted to know if the item could be pulled from the agenda in order for the Council to have a special meeting.

Mr. Marshall stated he would be willing to do it.

Mr. Harvey noted a special meeting has to met the lay overtime requirement to make a substantial amendment.

Mrs. Dawson noted the Council would have to have a special meeting and then another final adoption.

Mr. Marshall said tonight the Council can retract the motion and then offer what Mrs. Ezernack recommended.

Ms. Woods stated any change is a substantial change other than just letting it go like it is but if it doesn't past it goes away anyway.

Mrs. Sturdivant noted the bid law a substantial change is 10% therefore 10% of \$40,000 would be \$4,000. She said if the Council reduced it to \$126,000 the council could vote on it tonight. She said substantial is not defined but it is in the Louisiana Public Bid Law. She said she doesn't know if the City would meet the requirements for advertising if the Council doesn't vote on it tonight.

Ms. Woods said she doesn't have a problem with giving the raise because the raise is for the position. She said if people aren't satisfied with the people they have representing them they can vote people out. She said her only concern is the amount, and the City is not open to giving our everyday people such a large raise.

Mrs. Sturdivant noted with the ASME raise employees received between 5 to 35% and due to the delay of implementation the Mayor authorized an increase than what the wage study implemented. She said Gallagher recommended the City add 2 to 3 percent to that amount. She noted ASME covers the majority of the City employees such as Public Works and Community Affairs. She further noted the City has talked about possible raises in the near future once they see how sales tax will pan out. She said Mayor Ellis was not satisfied with the 5 to 35 percent raise but at the time they wanted to get it in so they can start collecting more wages and work on what they can do going forward.

Ms. Woods wanted to know how much an entry level Public Works employee makes an hour.

Mrs. Sturdivant noted the City of Monroe increased the minimum wage to \$11 an hour because they cannot start lower than that in the City of Monroe.

Mrs. Rowell said the goal is to get it to \$15 an hour at some point.

Mr. Harvey stated the Council is being asked to do what other Councils members weren't willing to do.

Mrs. Ezernack stated since she has been on the City Council, they have never been asked to give the Council and/or the Mayor's position a raise.

Mr. Harvey stated he is talking about over a period of time.

Mrs. Ezernack stated she wouldn't have voted to introduce the item if she knew the Council couldn't have a discussion and make some sort of change. She further stated it has forced her to say that she doesn't support a raise for the Mayor's position because she can't negotiate a lower amount. She said it has boxed the Council in to take an all or nothing position which she feels strongly about with today's economy. She said she can remember when the City had furloughs and she doesn't ever want to go back to those times. She said the City has too many things going that is good but that can change as we know very quickly. She said she doesn't want to get in the position where we have a Mayor's position that is making a lot of money, but we won't have the kind of labor force to support it because they would have to lay people off.

Mrs. Rowell stated Mrs. Ezernack mentioned earlier that the Council position is only a part time position, but the City has a full time Mayor position and it is their only income. She said yes, the City is in high inflationary times now but looking back over the 20 years and what the inflation has been.

Mrs. Ezernack stated she ran the CPI she knows what that number would be but once again the City is playing catch up and the Council is being forced to make a decision that affects four years in the future when it was presented in one way. She said she agrees the Mayor's position does need a raise, but she cannot support the number that is being introduced.

Mr. Harvey wanted to know if Mrs. Ezernack would support the Mayor's raise if the raise was within 10% of the bid law.

Mrs. Ezernack said that is not really a big deal and overtime it is something, but once again has put the Council in a bad position.

Ms. Woods asked Mrs. Sturdivant for clarity that if the Council doesn't pass this item tonight that she doesn't know where it would put the Council. She said she was wondering if the Council could take a recess to give Mrs. Sturdivant time to be sure on what the date times look like. She said she is in favor of giving a raise to the Mayor's position but she is not in favor of giving it all at once.

Mrs. Sturdivant stated they have researched it but the laws aren't clear and she doesn't know if the term means in March or one year from the election date or one year from the date the new Mayor takes office. She said the laws are not clear and that is why she recommends voting on it tonight.

Ms. Woods said if Mrs. Sturdivant had researched and still didn't get any clarity on it then you would be clear to say this is what it is.

Mrs. Sturdivant said she has researched the Attorney General opinion and what other cities have done. She stated we all know that can take months even the ones they ask to expedited and she can tell the Council the salary of other city Mayors.

Mrs. Ezernack said once again we don't know if all of a sudden, they received a \$40,000 raise or \$10,000 raise.

Mrs. Sturdivant said Gonzales, LA population is 12,000 and they pay \$143,516 and Slidell, LA has 28,658 people they pay \$129,322. She said the City of Monroe has 48 plus thousand people and they are at 90,000 by far the lowest.

Ms. Woods said this one is really hard for her because she wants there to be a raise, however she feels boxed with that being said she vote nay.

Mr. Marshall said he understands the concerns of everyone, but the Council has to consider everything. He said opening this door will open up the market for more qualified people to run for office. He said the amount seems a little bit farfetched, but the City has Department heads that make 10 to 15 thousand dollars more and he knows there have been conversations about giving the City employees more raises as well. He said to keep from having to go down this road again in the future voted aye.

Mrs. Ezernack stated she feels the position needs a raise and she doesn't want anyone to think she feels otherwise. She said she knows the position is 24 hours a day 7 days a week but once again she feels boxed in not being able to make any substitute except \$4,000 a year which in four years is \$16,000 which is chicken feed therefore with that being said she that voted nay.

The Chairman opened the Public Hearing and seeing no one come forward the Hearing was closed.

(f) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack, seconded by Mr. Harvey and approved an Ordinance No. 12,154 to amend the Zoning Map for the City of Monroe, Louisiana, and providing with respect thereto – Applicant – Carday Marshall – (P&Z) (There were no public comments.) (Mr. Marshall abstain)

Citizen's Participation

(1) Lester Pastor, South Point Drive Apt 301, stated he has been trying to get the last Administration to carry out an appeal. He said when the current Mayor was elected into office he asked him to look at his court appeal but he has heard nothing from him. He further stated the Court gave strict orders to Monroe City Court that he was charged with a State charge in this case. He said a new proceeding has not taken place yet and that does not mean the City has the right to dismiss the case. He said the case does not belong to the Monroe City Court and he should not have to protest in order for this order to be carried out. He noted he is a veteran with an honorable discharge, and he should not have to protest for the City to carry out this order. He further noted the Monroe City Court Clerk of Court office said this order was burnt in the fire which is no excuse for them to not carry out this order.

(2) Michael Castor, 348 Garden Avenue, said the Council has been talking about what to do with the recreation centers for the summer. He said last summer he went into his own pocket for the T-ball summer program to buy uniforms and balls but at the same time Mr. Carday gave money, but it never made it to the recreation center. He said the City says the citizens don't want to help but

that is why. He said the backpack give away, they put out over 600 backpacks and the City didn't help them. He said put alarms on the doors at the recreation centers they are trying to keep guns out of the recreation centers but as long as they can open those doors, and nobody knows the guns are there they will still be coming in.

(3) Ms. Augusta Turner, 2205 Tower Drive, said she is representing the oldest African American female owned radio station in Louisiana KOUS 96.3. She stated they are having their 20th year anniversary on June 24, 2023, at the University of Monroe at Louisiana Bayou room and everyone is invited.

(4) Ms. Marie Brown, 1002 South 5th Street, said they are getting ready for the Juneteenth celebration which is a two-day event. She said the Juneteenth parade will be on June 17th and she wants to see everyone on a float in the parade. She said she knows the City has made Juneteenth a month-long celebration but to not have an official logo for Juneteenth the citizens need some real skin in the game from the City. She said there are a lot of things they would like to do this year such as a pageant and honor teachers. She said she spent 28 days reading in the schools and she was tired once she finished reading to the kids. She said next year for the 28-day readathon she would like to see everyone coming out to read to the children. She said if we say we are going to do real things in the community and the citizens expect some real work being done when the Council is receiving a raise for next year.

(5) Mr. Gene Payne, 1701 Reed Street, said he is concerned about transparency with the civic leaders, and we understand Renwick and Louberta was scheduled to be blocked off and he doesn't understand how the civic officials didn't have the information about it. He said he would like the public to know the things he knows such as things with Public Works and Transit. He said he understands management has been sold to another company and the public should know that.

(6) Mr. Chris Richards, Choosing Independence, said he was going to talk about housing but hearing the various discussions tonight he wants to focus on one of the most important aspects that their housing program will bring to the City and that is jobs. He said their program is built off a mandate that is 70 to 75% of the jobs that are affiliated with our bill (housing program) that comes directly from the people of Monroe. He said outside of life insurance being built into the mortgage these are things the community needs. He said Monroe is no different than Los Angeles in terms of the needs of housing and jobs. He said the only difference is in different areas are different entry levels of the jobs being brought to the community. He stated their program is community base and it will have the biggest impact on those individuals that are in the centers bringing guns. He further stated if they launch the apprenticeship in the City of Monroe it not only affects Monroe, but it provides new business for the residents of Monroe.

There being no further business to come before the council, the meeting was adjourned at 8:03 p.m., upon motion of Ms. Woods and it was seconded by Mr. Harvey.

Mrs. Kema Dawson
Chairman

Ms. Carolus S. Riley
Council Clerk

Ileana Murray
Staff Secretary

