

City Hall, Monroe, Louisiana
November 28, 2023
6:00 p.m.

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 Mr. Marshall or his designee.

The Invocation was led by Assistant Pastor Rachel Washington, Greater Faith Church.

COMMUNICATIONS & SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Mr. Harvey had no announcements.

Ms. Woods said good evening and thanked everyone for coming to the City Council meeting. She said the Council hopes everyone had an absolutely great Thanksgiving. She thanked Pastor Vance Price and the Community of Faith Church for serving a Thanksgiving meal at the Mount Zion Baptist Church the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. She congratulated Seta Zeta Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., who will be celebrating fifty years of existence. She said they will be celebrating this weekend, and they are bringing members from all over the world. On another note, she expressed her condolences to Mr. Zachary Simmons, Director of Utilities Operations, who lost his wife, and she stated her heart is sadden and she is praying for him and his family. She further stated her condolences to Mr. Nnamdi Thompson, Government Consultant, who lost his father on Thanksgiving day. She stated to anyone listening, looking for a career path or a job opportunity, on Friday December 1, 2023, Nova Workforce Institute will be hosting a meet and greet at the Tower Place Center on the corner of Tower Drive and North 19th Street from 10 a.m. until noon. She noted there will be a lot of employers and she said if there are any employers looking for great people to work for you, there will be a lot of great people looking for opportunities. She further noted for those who have not had the opportunity to see the newly named convention center that was unveiled that the building was named in honor of former Monroe Mayor Abe Pierce III. She said it was a very historic moment for the City of Monroe to have the first African American Mayor to have a building named after him, which was built during his Administration.

Mr. Marshall thanked everyone for coming to the City Council meeting. He thanked Ms. Emma Mayweather and everyone who contributed to feeding residents along the South 2nd corridor. He said she called him about a month ago and she stated she wanted to do something for the homeless and anyone that was in need in the community. He said a lot of people gathered together and blessed hundreds of people along the South 2nd corridor. He said she fed people from her own home and the spirit of Thanksgiving was truly in that area. He said it was definitely a Thanksgiving to be proud of and he was blessed to see so many people all across the City giving back. He noted the Council went to the National Leagues of Cities and brought a lot of great information back and they gained a lot of knowledge as well. He said such as building partnerships with non-profits and businesses can contribute to the City because we know the City can't do it alone. He further noted the need for the Black Chamber was another thing that came up and he said all across the nation people are encouraging Black Chamber's to be established. He said things like partnerships, new organizations, and working together are definitely things that will help push the City forward to bring new light and new things to the City.

Mrs. Dawson thanked everyone for being in attendance and she expressed her condolences to the families that Ms. Woods acknowledged as well. She expressed her condolences to the Neville High School family on the passing of Mr. Roosevelt Rankins (Mr. Neville) and she said he will be funeralized this weekend. She noted on December 2nd the Monroe Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. will be having a Mardi Gras Holiday brunch at the W Event Center and the Arts with Passion will be having a "A Christmas Musical Dinner Theatre" Sunday December 10th at 5:30 p.m. She further noted the City is still doing things with art and to take a look at theartsforpassion.com. to see if there are some things you would want to attend.

Mrs. Ezernack announced the City Council last meeting in December that was scheduled for Tuesday, December 26th will be changed to Wednesday, December 27, 2023, at 6 p.m. She said she thinks the City is off that day as well and a lot of people will still be celebrating Christmas at that time with their families.

Mayor Friday Ellis echoed Mr. Marshall and he said it was a great Thanksgiving, and it was good to be around the City to see so many people volunteering and giving time and effort to serve others in their community. He said there were so many people packing the Civic Center, packing boxes, giveaways, and turkeys and it made his heart happy. He thanked all the City of Monroe employees, and he said the employee breakfast is always a good time to let them know they are appreciated. He said he encourages the public to keep up the good kudos whenever you see a City of Monroe employee. He said it means more than you know whether you leave a snack out, or bring out water, a coke, or drink or just a thumbs up. On another note, he said the Abe Pierce building dedication was a beautiful ceremony and he learned a lot about former Mayor Pierce. He said he appreciated Councilwoman Woods for bringing this dedication forward because it is a great way to honor a man that spent his entire life serving others. He noted the Benoit Playground, and the naming of the playground was a beautiful ceremony and he said he appreciated Councilwoman Dawson for bringing this project forward. He said he learned a lot about a woman who loved her community and seeing the community that loved her back, show up. He stated a few things on the calendar such as Highway 165 North and I-20 small business meet and greet. He said it is hosted quarterly in different parts of the City for business owners to talk about some challenges and struggles they may be facing and ways the City can help. He further stated the meet and greet will be November 30, 2023, at the Clarke M. Williams Innovation Campus. He thanked the I-20 Board for their hard work and for working together to get the ruts and things finished. He said the ribbon cutting will be November 29, 2023, at 2 p.m. The Mayor said to shop locally because 60 cents of every dollar gets recirculated back into the community and to remember to sponsor T-ball teams. He said it is the small business vendors who are the ones to cut the checks and do what you can to keep dollars local. He said to remember the City's small business vendors that pour so much into their business and out there chasing a dream to bring nice things to the community. He stated to remember any veterans or people serving in the military this time of the year that are away from family. He further stated if you know a veteran put that pen to paper and he said a letter in the mail is worth a brick of gold in the military. He said to know someone back home is thinking about you and cares for you, there is nothing like mail call on the holidays.

Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mr. Marshall the minutes of the Legal and Regular Session of October 24, 2023, were unanimously approved. (There were no public comments.)

Presentation: Fiscal Year Audit Presentation: Allen, Green & Williamson, LLP:

Mr. Tim Green, External Auditor, welcomed everyone and introduced Ms. Jennie Henry, CPA Audit Manager, that was in charge of this audit, and she will be assisting with the audit presentation. He said the general funds revenues exceeded our expenditures a couple hundred thousand dollars which is good. He said that when you look at the fund balance that is in the report that we have accumulated over time it's about \$19 million and the City is spending about \$70 million a year. He said that divided up is about \$6,000 a month that the City is spending, and we have about three months of reserve, which is a good thing. He noted the I-20 Corridor Improvements and Capital Infrastructure showed where the City spent more money than what was taken in, but with Capital Outlay, it's a good thing that the City is spending the money that is being collected. He further noted Major Proprietary Funds which are: Airport, Water Fund, Sewer, and the Nonmajor Proprietary Funds which are the following: Louisiana Purchase Gardens & Zoo, the Monroe Transit, and Civic Center which mentions the profits the City had, the losses that occurred, and the internal service fund which is our insurance fund. He said in recent years that fund has really struggled because it has had a lot of claims where it has to continuously have to put more money into it. He said this year the claims were actually down, and we had a couple million-dollar access in that particular fund which is a good thing as well. He stated the Sales Tax Collection Department, collecting the sales tax for the entire parish which is about \$240 million flows through its entirety during the year where the city ends up with \$70 million of that and the rest goes to the other taxes and bodies. He said the ad valorem tax rates, just got approval to renew those mileages, there were three that were on the ballot and seven other mileages that will come up on the ballot in 2028. He noted the City long-term debts had a new issue of \$12 million in bonds this year for the Downtown Economic Development District. He said the City paid off about \$13 million from

operations for other debts. He further noted the City's outstanding debt, total debt for the Proprietary Funds, and the General Funds are \$141 million in bonded debt. He said for the outstanding debt about \$12 million of that is being paid by the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) for the building of the new terminal from a few years ago. He said Statistical Section remains the bigger audit report has a lot of ten-year historical data.

Ms. Jennie Henry, CPA Audit Manager, said this year the expenditures that were funded by federal dollars was \$22 million for the City and the prior year was only \$13.6 million. She said some of the largest programs that received this money were the Coronavirus State & Fiscal Recovery Funds which was over \$7 million. She said there was also some FEMA money that was recovered from Hurricane Laura, Highway Transportation, and the Airport. She said there were five federal programs that they tested this year: Airport Improvement Program, Transit Formula Program, Coronavirus State & Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, Disaster Grants (FEMA funding), and the Highway Planning & Construction Cluster, which entailed the Kansas Lane Connector, South Grand, and Lee Avenue. She said that there were no federal compliance findings, and those programs were in very good shape. On another note, she stated there were three findings in the report, the first finding had to do with Internal Control over the Water Distribution Purchase. She said there was a purchase made at the end of last year 2022, they felt that the procedures were not taken to ensure that all of these products were not usable by the City at the time. She stated this was also a finding because this purchase did not have bid, but quotes were received, the items were purchased from three vendors, but it wasn't according to bid law, because each item wasn't over the bid threshold. She said another finding was the Internal Control over Fuel Cards and when they looked at the fuel cards there were several names of employees that were no longer employed with the City. She said they recommended procedures to have those individuals removed when they were no longer employed by the City. She noted Statewide Agreed-Upon Procedures, there were two exceptions: Bank Reconciliations- where reconciliations are not prepared within 30 days. She also said there were two places where cash drawers were being shared by employees located at Chennault Golf and Monroe Police Department. She said that last year the finding had to do with bond disclosures, they considered that clear because the information was being submitted. She also wanted to mention that this report is a public document and be viewed on the Legislative Auditors website.

Mr. Allen noted the GASB 87 (Governmental Accounting Standards Board) which is recognized accounting and external reporting standards board for the United States. Three years ago, they had a long implementation period because of the complexity and the size of what they were requesting in reference to leases. GASB 87 standard required a huge undertaking by the accounting department studying the Standard, pulling old lease contracts going back even as far as the 1960s, studying the agreements, preparing extensive spreadsheets, and concluding on whether the lease agreements were true leases per GASB 87 or were just annual operating agreements. This standard encompasses both situations of the City leasing items as lessee from third parties, such as vehicles and equipment as well as the City leasing as the lessor items to other parties, such as land, hangers, and buildings most of which are in the Air Industrial Park. He wanted to give Melanie Watson and her staff kudos for the hard work that they did. He also thanked Mrs. Yolanda Washington for her tireless efforts over the last two to three years as well as Stacey Rowell, Director of Administration and Mr. Brandon Creekbaum, City Attorney, for their corporation and help in making this audit successful. He said Mr. Marc Keenan, Transit Manager, Mr. Charles Butcher, Airport Director, Mr. Morgan McCalister, City Engineer, Ms. Stacey Rowell, and Ms. Melanie Watson in accounting, and Ms. Roshonda Gospel from Public Works, they deserve a big round of applause because we didn't have any findings and that is rare. He also wanted to thank Mayor Friday Ellis and Chief Jimmy Bryant, Chief Operating Officer and the others that helped them greatly through this audit and they appreciate it.

Mr. Harvey wanted to know was all of GASB 87 Lease treatment complete at this stage.

Mr. Allen noted they've got a companion standard, and it is referenced to technology and kind of separated that out when they adopted GASB for the bulk of the leases. He further the City have the IT that's coming up this year that will go much quicker this time around with all the experience on the regular leases because it's very similar to the GASB 87 standard.

Mr. Harvey wanted to know if those were shorter leases with quicker turns, would it matter or is that how we treat it.

Mr. Allen said it's how you'll treat it, if it's a short term its less than a year then you don't have to follow the standard exception that you don't have to follow. He said he thinks a lot of them are multiple years so that would come into play, and it would be part of the changes the City make for this year.

Mayor Ellis stated that on behalf of Ms. Stacy Roswell, Director of Administration, and her team, Ms. Melanie Watson, Director of Accounting, Mrs. Yolanda Washington, Internal Auditor, and everybody did a great job. He said he knows the lease compliance was a tough job and they stuck with it for all of that and to say that these federal accounts had no findings, you know as well as he does that as these funds are going out they are a moving target while they were writing and rewriting the rules with them to stay on it the way that they did was an excellent job well done to them. He expressed how the department heads have been such good stewards over these dollars that we had, and he thanked them again for keeping the City in compliance.

Proposed Condemnation:

Mrs. Ezernack thanked Mr. Tommy James, Code Enforcement Officer, for helping the City get condemned properties into compliance or torn down. She said especially the small area on North 18th Street next to the CVS pharmacy. She said the City has been working on it for a long time and it is a big win that changed the whole area, and that side of the street looks much better.

Mr. James stated on behalf of the Planning and Urban Development Department the City is welcome.

The following condemnation was considered:

(1) 3307 Pearl Street (D4) (Owner – Ronald D. Richards) Notice to show cause was served. Photographic evidence was presented. Upon motion of Mr. Marshall, seconded by Mr. Harvey 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 Mr. Ronald Richards is present and he is very interested in bringing his property back up to standard. He said he had a lot of time to talk with Mr. Richards, who is an honorable discharged veteran. They are asking that the property be condemned giving the owner 120 days to bring the property back into compliance.

Mr. Marshall stated he had a conversation with Mr. Richards before the meeting and he is comfortable with the 120 days. He motion to condemn the property giving the owner 120 days to bring to structure up to code and remove any obnoxious growth.

RESOLUTIONS AND MINUTE ENTRIES:

Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mrs. Dawson and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8632 granting an exception to the Open Container Ordinance to the Twin City Art Foundation for an event (Artist Mixer) at the Masur Museum of Art pursuant to Monroe City Code Sec. 12-231 D. (Open Container Ordinance), and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Upon motion of Mr. Marshall, seconded by Mrs. Dawson and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8633 authorizing a designated city representative to execute Addendum No. 1 to the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement between the City of Monroe and Free Me Association d/b/a Monroe City Academy League (MCAL) and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Department of Administration:

Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mr. Marshall and unanimously approved to consider request from the Purchasing Division for authorization for an authorized City representative to advertise for bids for the Bayou Bartholomew Pump No. 2 Replacement Project. The Engineer's estimate is \$715,000.00. The DBE goal is 0% and the source of funds is the Water Capital Funds. (There were no public comments.)

Upon motion of Mrs. Dawson, seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved to Consider an Application by Hailey Ray dba Dizzy Donkey, 521 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.)

Upon motion of Mrs. Dawson, seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved to Consider twenty-eight (28) Renewal Applications for a New 2024 Class A Alcoholic Beverage Permit. The Monroe Police Department has no disqualifying records and Sales Tax has been approved. (There were no public comments.)

Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mrs. Dawson and unanimously approved to Consider twenty-one (21) Renewal Applications for a New 2024 Class B Alcoholic Beverage Permit. The Monroe Police Department has no disqualifying records and Sales Tax has been approved. (There were no public comments.)

Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mrs. Dawson and unanimously approved to Consider one (1) Renewal Applications for a New 2024 Class C Alcoholic Beverage Permit. The Monroe Police Department has no disqualifying records and Sales Tax has been approved. (There were no public comments.)

Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mrs. Dawson and unanimously approved to Consider one (1) Renewal Application for a New 2024 Class E Alcoholic Beverage Permit. The Monroe Police Department has no disqualifying records and Sales Tax has been approved. (There were no public comments.)

Department of Planning & Urban Development:

Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded Mrs. Dawson and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8634 authorizing a designated city representative to enter into and execute an Agreement between the City of Monroe and Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) AHAYAH Community Development Corporation, Inc. in the amount of \$50,000.00 from HOME M-22-MC-22-0206, and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mrs. Dawson and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8635 authorizing a designated city representative to enter into and execute an Agreement by and between the City of Monroe and Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) AHAYAH Community Development Corporation Inc. for the reconstruction of 2613 Price Street and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Ms. Ellen Hill, Director of Planning and Urban Development, noted this project is a partnership between the Community Housing Development Organization to do a reconstruction for a community resident that is in need, and he has been waiting for some time. She said he is a veteran, and it will give the City a chance to provide him with a safe and decent living space.

Upon motion of Mrs. Dawson, seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8636 authorizing the City of Monroe to accept grant funding through the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) "Lead Hazard and Control and Healthy Homes" Grant Program and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Ms. Ellen Hill gave a short PowerPoint presentation, and she stated the City finally had a meeting with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and this is a public notice requirement for the grant. She said thanks to the Council the City submitted an application for 2023 the Lead Hazard and Control and Healthy Homes grant and they were successful. She said in the next 3 and half years the City will have 4.4 million dollars to focus on families that are in need. She said Ouachita Parish has been one of the parishes with the highest number of positive lead levels for children when they are testing and yet one of the lowest in the number of children tested. She noted a major part of this is educating the community as to why the City would need to make sure to test kids. She further noted 2/3 of our homes were built before 1978 and that means there is a high possibility. She said the number of houses that are owner occupied there are over 6,000 that are led risk, and we are a renter community. She noted one of the City's highest spots is North Monroe which the houses are older properties. She said there are also three census in

West Monroe, LA they will be working with as well. She further noted the City received a little over 4 million in Lead Hazard Reduction and the City received the full Healthy Homes Supplement Grant. She said with that the City is matching with the CDBG funds and taking the funds for what they are supposed to be used for leveraging. She stated the grant period will start December 1 until May 31, 2027, and the City's goal is 130 houses at least depending on how the money shapes out they may be able to do more. She further stated the partnership with weatherization grant they learned through this process that if you qualify for the Lead Program HUD has made it possible to qualify for that based on income. She said for eligibility the home must have been built before 1978, have children six years or younger in the home or visits, an expecting mother, the house has to be livable, and actually test positive for lead. She said the application is online, but they must attend a program information session to understand the requirements and documents they collect. She said the first quarter is January 25th and they normally meet at the public safety center, and they hope to schedule some at the community centers going forward. She thanked the City Council for their support, the Children's Coalition, and the United Way that not only provided a support letter but also provided them with ideas on how the City can get the information out to the community.

Mr. Harvey noted what a win for an incredibly vulnerable part of the population.

Mrs. Ezernack thanked everyone who contributed to the application, and she said it is very much appreciated.

Engineering Services:

Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mrs. Dawson and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8637 accepting as partially (Phase 1 of 2) substantially complete work done by Max Foote Construction Company for the Water Treatment Plant Renovation and Expansion Project and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Mr. Harvey stated this project is a major milestone.

Mrs. Ezernack noted this is another exciting project.

Mayor Ellis said with part supply issues and the price of construction through the roof, he said Mr. Sean Benton and his team are doing a great job.

Mrs. Ezernack stated it is a wonderful milestone for the community and what it will bring for the future. She thanked everyone involved at this point and she said moving on to complete Phase 2 will be next.

Upon motion of Mrs. Dawson, seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8638 accepting as substantially complete work done by Benchmark Construction Group of Louisiana, LLC for the Benoit Recreation Center Parking Lot Improvements Project and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

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

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

Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mrs. Dawson and unanimously approved Ordinance No. 12,205 authorizing the City of Monroe to take Corporeal Possession of the property described below and sell to Kevin Lee, all rights, title, and interest that the City may have acquired to the Lot 6, Square 19, Alexander's Addition, Ouachita Parish, 3910 Lee, District 4, Monroe, La, by Adjudication at Tax Sale dated June 4, 2018, and further with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

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

Upon motion of Mrs. Dawson, seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved Ordinance No. 12,206 amending and reenacting Section 4-15 of the City of Monroe Code relating to Alcohol License Fees for new businesses and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

There being no further business to come before the council, the meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m., upon motion of Mr. Harvey and it was seconded by Mrs. Dawson.

Mrs. Gretchen Ezernack
Chairman

Ms. Carolus S. Riley
Council Clerk

Ms. Ileana Murray
Staff Secretary