

**CITY OF COVINGTON
COVINGTON CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
FEBRUARY 4, 2020**

Council Vice President Rolling called the regular meeting to order at 6:00pm.

Roll call was as follows:

PRESENT: Peter Lewis Sr., John Botsford, Cody Ludwig, Mark W. Verret, Diane Weiss and Larry Rolling

ABSENT: Joey Roberts

ALSO PRESENT: Mayor Mark R. Johnson, Director of Administration/Chief Administrative Officer Erin Bivona, City Attorney Rod Rodrigue, Director of Finance Stephen Sanders, IT Assistant Quenton Belanger

A Moment of Silence was observed.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Councilman Peter Lewis Sr.

APPEARER

Council Vice President Rolling introduced Ms. Linda Gutierrez from ReMed of Louisiana – NRLC, who discussed her facility located at 614 West 18th Avenue in Covington, which provides post-acute physical, cognitive and neurobehavioral rehabilitation for people with traumatic brain injuries and other neurologic impairments.

CONSENT CALENDAR

Councilman Botsford made a motion to adopt the consent calendar, seconded by Councilwoman Weiss. Roll call: Yeas – 6; Absent – 1 (Roberts) to adopt the consent calendar. The consent calendar was adopted.

REGULAR AGENDA

Unfinished Business

Items to be voted on:

1. PUBLIC HEARING AND ACTION ON ITEM NO. 2020-01-01 – An Ordinance of the City of Covington Amending the 2020 Budget for the City’s New Website (Ludwig)

Councilwoman Ludwig led a discussion on Item No. 2020-01-01.

Councilwoman Weiss made a motion to close the public hearing, seconded by Councilwoman Ludwig. There were no objections to closing the public hearing. The public hearing was closed.

Councilwoman Ludwig made a motion to adopt Item No. 2020-01-01, seconded by Councilwoman Weiss. Roll call: Yeas – 6; Absent – 1 (Roberts) to adopt Item No. 2020-01-01. Item No. 2020-01-01 was adopted.

New Business

Items for discussion:

1. Recent email issues – City departments (Rolling)

Chief Administrative Officer Erin Bivona discussed her recent correspondence to the Council in which she responded to the Council’s request for information concerning the recent email outage. She explained that the outage occurred on Friday, January 17, 2020 while solving a routine maintenance issue that required the server to be restarted. During this process, an error occurred that caused the Administration database to enter a state called a “dirty shutdown.” In order to avoid an unrecoverable loss of emails, a backup process was begun. The process took the majority of the weekend and was completed on Monday, January 20, 2020. On Tuesday, January 21, 2020, a third party team was brought in to expedite the recovery process and minimize the risk of losing any additional data. That process was finalized on Friday, January 24, 2020 by establishing temporary email accounts for all affected employees and initiating the process of restoring old contacts, calendars and emails. She stated that as of February 3, 2020, the majority of the emails had been restored. Also, she stated that the solution to prevent future outages is to replace the current email server, which is budgeted and in the process of being implemented.

IT Assistant Quenton Belanger answered some technical questions about the email outage.

COMMENTS AND REPORTS

Council District and Committee Reports

1. **District A –**

Councilman Lewis thanked the Council, Mayor and everyone who helped out and supported the MLK events.

2. **District B –**

Councilman Botsford mentioned that the grand opening of the Food Bank’s new facility was January 2nd and tours are available to the public. Also, he mentioned that the Food Bank is accepting donations and looking for volunteers.

3. **District C – Absent**

4. **District D –**

Councilwoman Ludwig announced that the Covington branch of the St. Tammany Parish Library has re-opened and some new children’s elements have been added. Also, she mentioned that the Krewe of Olympia parade will be held on Saturday, February 15th at 6pm and reminded the public that the route will include West 14th Avenue due to the work on West 15th Avenue. Upcoming events: the Mardi Gras Day parade on Tuesday, February 25th at 10am and the free after-parade event from 12:30pm until 3:30pm at the Trailhead; and the Mystic Krewe of Mardi Paws will be held on Sunday, March 1, 2020 at 12:30pm in downtown Covington.

5. **District E –**

Councilman Verret read a statement into the record regarding the request to close streets around St. Peter’s School:

“The policy goals of the Code of Governmental Ethics state clearly under Revised Statute 42:1101, that the policy goals are to ensure the public confidence in the integrity of government; to ensure the independence and impartiality of elected officials; and to ensure that governmental decisions and policy are made in the proper channel. I believe it is my duty to avoid even the appearance of any conflict or any appearance of impropriety. In the interest of full disclosure, on January 30, 2020, the Covington Council office received correspondence from the Archdiocese of New Orleans specifically in regards to the discussion ongoing at this time about

securing certain crossing streets at St. Peter's during school hours to ensure the safety of the children. I'm a practicing attorney in addition to being on the City Council. My law firm does represent the Archdiocese of New Orleans. With that said, I must avoid any appearance of impropriety. This prohibition applies to both professional and personal conduct. I expect to be the subject of constant public scrutiny and I accept freely and willingly any restrictions that might be viewed as burdensome by any ordinary citizen. Frankly, this is to bolster the public trust in government. So under the rules as I see it, under Revised Statute 42:1120, an elected official may participate in the debate and discussion of any matter but only if he discloses the nature of any perceived conflict or appearance on the record prior to any final vote. The elected official is not allowed to vote on the matter and he must recuse himself. So, I therefore publicly disclose that because of any perceived conflict or any perceived appearance, I will abstain from any vote on the proposal."

6. At Large (Interim) –

Interim Councilwoman at Large Weiss requested an update on the West 15th Avenue between Menetre and Mile Branch road project.

Mayor Johnson responded that the project has not been completed yet and another 4" layer of asphalt will be applied to the roadway.

6. At Large (Vice President) –

Council Vice President Rolling announced that the Council meeting scheduled for Tuesday, March 3, 2020 has been changed to Tuesday, March 10, 2020 at 6pm in the Council Chambers. Also, he announced that seven new occupational licenses were issued in January 2020. He reminded everyone about the Krewe of Olympia parade on Saturday, February 15th and the route change due to the bridge construction on West 15th Avenue. He made some announcements concerning Carnival in Covington: the Lion's Club parade will be held on Mardi Gras Day, Tuesday, February 25th, starting at 10am at the Justice Center; the Grand Marshal will be Chef Pat Gallagher and the Celebrity Grand Marshal will be Vince Vance; marching groups, riders or other participants are encouraged to join in the parade; the after-parade party will start at 12:30pm at the Trailhead; the CBA will sponsor a costume contest at the Trailhead and he encouraged the public to participate; and there will be a community chorus float sponsored by CLECO in which chorus members from local churches will perform as the parade rolls down the streets. Also, he extended his prayers and condolences to the family of Pat Brister on her recent passing and expressed his appreciation for her support of the City of Covington.

Administrative Comments and Reports

1. Mayor Johnson-

- (a) He acknowledged and thanked Councilman Peter Lewis for his efforts in planning and organizing the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day parade and celebration.
- (b) He thanked the Council for changing the March Council meeting date.
- (c) He presented the Public Works organizational chart and discussed the current vacancies along with the challenges HR faces in filling some of the positions. He outlined the pay scale for the Public Works labor force and pointed out that approximately 20% of the positions are vacant.

Councilwoman Ludwig commented that it is impressive how fast and thorough Public Works handles issues when it is short-staffed.

Councilman Verret commented that Public Works does an outstanding job even though it has a 20% vacancy rate in its labor force.

Council Vice President Rolling inquired as to Administration's plan to address the shortfall in the Public Works labor force.

Mayor Johnson responded that he would like the Council's input as to how this problem should be addressed.

Interim Councilwoman at Large Weiss inquired as to the qualifications and requirements for these Public Works positions and whether or not individuals with these job qualifications are available in our area.

Mayor Johnson responded that some positions require basic skills and qualifications, such as a driver's license and other positions require more specialized training such as certifications.

Councilman Lewis inquired as to how our pay scale compares to other municipalities.

Mayor Johnson responded that he does not have the comparison with him this evening, but it's his understanding that wages across the United States have increased somewhere between 7% to 10% over the past few years.

Council Vice President Rolling stated that once the new Council at Large is elected in the spring, he will schedule a Finance Committee meeting to discuss these issues.

Councilman Botsford inquired as to whether or not the wages paid to the Public Works labor force include health insurance and retirement benefits.

Mayor Johnson responded that the wages include health insurance and retirement benefits.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:50pm.

/s/ _____
LARRY ROLLING
Council Vice President

/s/ _____
BONNIE D. CHAMPAGNE
Council Clerk