

**CITY OF COVINGTON
COVINGTON CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 14, 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, Joey Roberts, Cody Ludwig, Mark W. Verret and Larry Rolling

ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT: Mayor Mark R. Johnson, Director of Administration/Chief Administrative Officer Erin Bivona, City Attorney Rod Rodrigue, Police Chief Stephen Culotta, Director of Public Works Chris Davis, Director of Finance Stephen Sanders, Utility Billing Director Cindy Samuel and Denise Windom, Administrative Assistant to CAO Erin Bivona

A Moment of Silence was observed.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mrs. Diane Weiss.

MAYORAL NOMINATION AND COUNCIL CONFIRMATION

Mayor Johnson nominated Erin Bivona as Director of Administration/Chief Administrative Officer for the City of Covington. Councilman Botsford made a motion to confirm Erin Bivona as Director of Administration/Chief Administrative Officer, seconded by Councilman Roberts. Roll call was unanimous to confirm Erin Bivona as Director of Administration/Chief Administrative Officer for the City of Covington.

APPEARERS

Councilman Verret introduced Ms. Jaci Sewell, who gave a brief presentation on CLECO's PowerWise Program, which is a program designed to help customers lower their electric bills.

(Ms. Linda Gutierrez from ReMed of Louisiana – NRLC was scheduled to appear but was unable to attend the meeting.)

CONSENT CALENDAR

Councilman Verret made a motion to adopt the consent calendar, seconded by Councilman Roberts. Roll call was unanimous 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. 2019-11-02** – An Ordinance of the City of Covington Amending the Official Zoning Map of the City of Covington, Louisiana, to Reclassify Lot 34, Block 92, Ozone Place, City of Covington, Parish of St. Tammany, State of Louisiana, from CR (Regional

Commercial) to RSL (Single-Family Residential—Existing Small Lots) (Zoning Case No. 19-10-03REZONING) (Botsford)

Councilman Botsford led a discussion on Item No. 2019-11-02.

Councilman Botsford made a motion to close the public hearing, seconded by Councilman Roberts. There were no objections to closing the public hearing. The public hearing was closed.

Councilman Roberts made a motion to adopt Item No. 2019-11-02, seconded by Councilman Verret. Roll call was unanimous to adopt Item No. 2019-11-02. Item No. 2019-11-02 was adopted.

2. PUBLIC HEARING AND ACTION ON ITEM NO. 2019-12-01 – An Ordinance of the City of Covington Amending the Covington Code of Ordinances: Chapter 98 Utilities, Article I. In General and Article IV. Rates and Charges (Verret)

Councilman Verret led a discussion on Item No. 2019-12-01.

Councilman Verret 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.

Councilman Verret made a motion to adopt Item No. 2019-12-01, seconded by Councilwoman Ludwig. Roll call was unanimous to adopt Item No. 2019-12-01. Item No. 2019-12-01 was adopted.

3. PUBLIC HEARING AND ACTION ON ITEM NO. 2019-12-02 – An Ordinance of the City of Covington Amending the Official Zoning Map of the City of Covington, Louisiana, to Reclassify Lot Numbers 9 and 10, Square Number 2507, Town of New Covington, City of Covington, Parish of St. Tammany, State of Louisiana, from RS-3 (Two-Family Residential) to ML (Light Industrial/Manufacturing) (Zoning Case #19-11-04REZONING) (Lewis)

City Attorney Rod Rodrigue stated that this matter appeared on the Zoning Commission's agenda and was approved unanimously with no opposition.

Councilman Botsford made a motion to close the public hearing, seconded by Councilman Roberts. There were no objections to closing the public hearing. The public hearing was closed.

Councilman Verret made a motion to adopt Item No. 2019-12-02, seconded by Council Vice President Rolling. Roll call was unanimous to adopt Item No. 2019-12-02. Item No. 2019-12-02 was adopted.

New Business

Items to be voted on:

1. RESOLUTION NO. 2020-01 -- A Resolution of the Covington City Council in Support of the U.S. Census Bureau and Participation in the 2020 Census (Rolling)

Council Vice President Rolling led a discussion on Resolution No. 2020-01.

Ms. Qiana Wiggins from the United States Census Bureau gave a brief presentation on the 2020 Census.

Councilman Botsford made a motion to adopt Resolution No. 2020-01, seconded by Councilman Roberts. Roll call was unanimous to adopt Resolution No. 2020-01. Resolution No. 2020-01 was adopted.

2. RESOLUTION NO. 2020-02 – A Resolution of the Covington City Council Authorizing the Closure of E. 20th Avenue Between S. Theard Street and S. Washington Street and S. Theard Street Between E. Temperance Street and E. 20th Avenue During School Hours (Ludwig)

Councilwoman Ludwig led a discussion on Resolution No. 2020-02.

Councilman Roberts made a motion to table Resolution No. 2020-02, seconded by Councilman Botsford. Roll call: Yeas – 5; Nays – 1 (Ludwig) to table Resolution No. 2020-02. Resolution No. 2020-02 was tabled.

3. RESOLUTION NO. 2020-03 -- A Resolution of the Covington City Council Appointing Diane Weiss as the Interim Councilwoman at Large (Rolling)

Council Vice President led a discussion on Resolution No. 2020-03.

Councilman Botsford made a motion to adopt Resolution No. 2020-03, seconded by Councilman Roberts. Roll call was unanimous to adopt Resolution No. 2020-03. Resolution No. 2020-03 was adopted.

City Attorney Rod Rodrigue administered the oath of office to Mrs. Weiss.

COMMENTS AND REPORTS

Council District and Committee Reports

1. District A –

Councilman Lewis reminded the public about some events scheduled in observance of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day: Saturday, January 18th – Free pancake breakfast from 8am until 11am at Mt. Zion Pilgrim Church; and Monday, January 20th – Parade at 10am at Reverend Peter Atkins Park followed by a program at 11am in the Fuhrmann Auditorium and ending with a “Fun Day” at Reverend Peter Atkins Park. He encouraged the public to attend these events.

2. District B –

Councilman Botsford encouraged the public to support and attend the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day events. Also, he mentioned that the Northshore Food Bank has moved into its new location and encouraged the public to visit the new facility.

3. District C –

Councilman Roberts mentioned that the residents of River Forest appreciate the drainage improvements and thanked Public Works for their efforts. Also, he congratulated all the newly-elected parish and state officials on being sworn into office yesterday. Also, he thanked everyone who qualified for the Council at Large seat and thanked Diane Weiss for once again agreeing to serve on the Council on an interim basis until the election.

4. District D –

Councilwoman Ludwig announced that the ribbon cutting for the re-opening of the Covington branch of the St. Tammany Parish Library will take place on Wednesday, February 5th at 11am. 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 has been changed slightly due to the work on West 15th Avenue.

Upcoming events: Coffee and Conversation with Mayor Mark on Thursday, January 16th at 9am; Carnival in Covington on Tuesday, February 25th; and the Farmer's Market every Wednesday and Saturday.

5. District E –

Councilman Verret thanked Diane Weiss for agreeing to serve as Interim Councilwoman at Large and looks forward to working with her. Also, he congratulated Erin Bivona on her appointment as Chief Administrative Officer and welcomed her to the City.

6. At Large (Interim) –

Interim Councilwoman at Large Weiss thanked the Council and Administration for the vote of confidence on her appointment. Also, she expressed her appreciation to District C Councilman Joey Roberts and the Public Works Department for their efforts with regard to the ongoing drainage work in River Forest. Also, she reminded everyone about the King Cake 5K and Fun Run on January 25th at Christ Episcopal Elementary School on New Hampshire Street.

6. At Large (Vice President) –

Council Vice President Rolling reminded everyone about the Lion's Club parade and the Carnival in Covington events on Mardi Gras Day, Tuesday, February 25th. He announced that the Grand Marshal will be Chef Pat Gallagher and the Celebrity Grand Marshal will be Vince Vance. He mentioned that following the parade, there will be music at the Trailhead from 12:30pm until 3:30pm. He encouraged marching groups, riders or other participants to join in the parade. He thanked the sponsors for their support for the Carnival in Covington events. Also, he reminded the public about the election for the Council at Large seat on Saturday, April 4th and encouraged everyone to vote.

Administrative Comments and Reports

1. Mayor Johnson-

(a) He discussed the January/February newsletter and encouraged the public to pick up one at City Hall or at various locations around the City.

(b) He mentioned that he has been Mayor for approximately six months and it has been a smooth transition with very few surprises. He stated that the City of Covington is in a good place but is facing some challenges:

(1) The Covington police officers are the lowest paid in St. Tammany Parish and our Police Department has been short-staffed for at least the past ten years. Over those ten years, over 32 officers have left the City to work for other law enforcement agencies. *(He presented the organizational chart for the Police Department as of October 2019 and discussed the filled positions as well as the vacancies.)*

(2) The City incurs a deficit every year in providing sewer and water to our residents. He pointed out that the amount charged to the residents for water

and sewer does not cover the cost to the City for providing the water and sewer. He stated that in 2020, the subsidy amount is 2.2 million dollars.

(3) The City's #1 primary response fire engine is a 1993 model and should have been decommissioned in 2008. He added that over the years, it has become difficult to obtain replacement parts.

(4) The wastewater treatment plant works well but is in need of refurbishing.

(5) Citizens have expressed their concerns about the traffic on Tyler Street and Collins Boulevard but there is no money allocated in 2020 for traffic improvements.

(6) The City of Covington has the lowest property tax millage in St. Tammany Parish and our utility rates tend to run about 50% of those in surrounding areas.

He encouraged the citizens of Covington to reflect upon these issues and to express their thoughts to the City Council.

Councilman Botsford inquired as to the increase in sewer and wastewater on rainy days as opposed to non-rainy days.

Mayor Johnson responded that on non-rainy days, the wastewater treatment plant handles approximately 1 million gallons of sewer and wastewater and on rainy days, it increases to about 7 million gallons of sewer and wastewater.

Councilman Botsford inquired as to the cost to train an officer to be street-ready.

Police Chief Culotta responded that the cost for the POST Academy is about \$3,000 and the equipment and additional training costs thousands of dollars.

Councilman Roberts inquired as whether or not other municipalities pay for their officers to attend POST training.

Police Chief Culotta responded that it is common practice for all police agencies to pay for the training for their officers as well as the officers' salaries during training.

Mayor Johnson commented that the real cost to the community is not the training but the fact that most officers are trained by the City and then leave for positions with other law enforcement agencies.

Interim Councilwoman at Large Weiss inquired as to the last time the millage rates were increased for the City of Covington.

Mayor Johnson responded that it has been at least 8-10 years since the millage rates were increased.

Council Vice President Rolling requested information on the salary gap between City of Covington police officers and surrounding law enforcement agencies.

Mayor Johnson responded that the starting salary for our police officers is \$31,000 which includes healthcare for the officer but not his or her family. The starting salary for Mandeville police officers is \$35,000 which includes healthcare for the officer and his or her family.

Police Chief Culotta mentioned that the officers who are leaving the Covington Police Department for employment with the St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's office have indicated that their compensation package with the Sheriff's office will be approximately \$45,000 per year.

Council Vice President Rolling mentioned that 2020 is a reassessment year and the City may wish to consider increasing millage rates to help alleviate some of the financial issues.

Mayor Johnson commented that if the City were to increase utility rates by an average of \$19.00 per month, the subsidy would be decreased from 2.2 million dollars to 1.1 million dollars per year.

2. Erin Bivona, Director of Administration/Chief Administrative Officer -

Director of Administration/Chief Administrative Officer Erin Bivona thanked Mayor Johnson for the opportunity to serve as Director of Administration/Chief Administrative Officer and looks forward to working for the City of Covington.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:05pm.

/s/ _____
LARRY ROLLING
Council Vice President

/s/ _____
BONNIE D. CHAMPAGNE
Council Clerk