

CITY OF COVINGTON
COVINGTON CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

June 08, 2021

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

Roll call was as follows:

PRESENT: Larry Rolling, John Botsford, Mark W. Verret, Joey Roberts, Cody Ludwig, and Rick Smith.

ABSENT: Peter Lewis Sr.

ALSO, PRESENT: Mayor Mark R. Johnson, Chief Administrative Officer Erin Bivona, City Attorney, Rod Rodrigue

A Moment of Silence was observed.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by former Councilwoman Francis Dunn.

APPEARERS

Councilman President Rolling introduced Mrs. Julie Agan, Executive Director of COAST-Council on Aging, St. Tammany. Mrs. Agan stated they have changed their logos and promotion materials just to show a new energy. The Covington Center is now open from 9-10:30am every day. Masks are required. Lunches are not being served yet. From July 1, 2020 to May 1, 2021, 157,275 meals were delivered throughout the parish. They have seven centers throughout the parish that offer 22 different services. During the Pandemic, they partnered with the food bank and will partner with them again this year.

Councilman Botsford thanked Mrs. Agan.

Councilman Smith also thanked Mrs. Agan for her service to COAST.

Councilman Larry Rolling stated COAST is very dear to his heart for he served on their board for quite a few years and recognized Jan Butler in the audience for her service to COAST and thanked Mrs. Agan for everything she does as Executive Director of COAST.

CONFIRMATION OF MAYORAL APPOINTMENT OF MICHAEL

FERRELL AS POLICE CHIEF: Councilman Rolling announced that this will be postponed until Tuesday, June 15, 2021 for a special Council Meeting at the Council Chambers at 6:00pm. The public is invited.

CONSENT CALENDAR

Councilman Smith made a motion to adopt the consent calendar, seconded by Councilman Botsford. Roll Call: Yeas-6, Nays-0, Absent-1 to adopt the consent calendar. The consent calendar was adopted.

REGULAR AGENDA

Unfinished Business

Items to be voted on:

- 1. PUBLIC HEARING ACTION ON NO. 2021-04-01-** An Ordinance of the City of Covington Amending the Following Provisions of the Appendix B Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance of 2010, Part 3. Use Districts, to Add Section 3.23 IH-2 Limited Hospitals. (Zoning Case No. 21-03-01TXT) (Ludwig)

Councilwoman Ludwig ask Councilman President Rollings for leave to withdraw Item # 2021-04-01. Item # 2021-04-01 was withdrawn.

- 2. PUBLIC HEARING ACTION ON ITEM NO. 2021-04-02-** An Ordinance of the City of Covington Amending the Following provision of the Covington Code of Ordinances: Appendix B- Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance of 2010, Part 3 Use Districts, Section 3.50 Statutory Authority, Findings of Fact, Purpose and Methods of Flood Hazard Prevention; Section 3.5008 Provisions for Flood Hazard reduction. (Zoning Case No. 21-03-02TXT) (Botsford)

Councilman Botsford called on Chris Brown, City of Covington Building Official to explain the ordinance.

Mr. Chris Brown , Building Official and Flood Plan Administrator stated that this is just a text change. It is actually some new language that FEMA wants incorporated into our ordinances. It changes nothing of what we are actually doing.

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

Councilman Smith made a motion to adopt Item No. 2021-04-02 seconded by Councilman Botsford. Roll Call was unanimous to adopt Item No. 2021-04-02. Item No. 2021-04-02 was adopted.

- 3. PUBLIC HEARING ACTION ON NO. 2021-04-03-**An Ordinance of the City of Covington Declaring the Unconstructed Linda Street, situated near Phyllis Dr. located in Old Landing Addendum, to the City of Covington, St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana, Abandoned, Vacated, Closed and Not Needed for Public Purposes (Planning Case No. 21-03-01SAC (Street Revocation) (Verret)

Councilman Verret stated this is a proposed ordinance, which will declare the unconstructed areas situated near Phyllis Dr. in Old Covington. Referring to what is attached to the agenda, it is not going to be used for public purposes. There is one exception, the City will retain a 20 foot drainage servitude lying 10 feet on each side. We also have an appraisal, which will authorize the Mayor to make the sale.

Councilman Smith 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. 2021-04-03 seconded by Councilman Botsford. Roll Call was unanimous to adopt Item No. 2021-04-03. Item No. 2021-04-03 was adopted.

B. Items for discussion: None.

NEW BUSINESS

Items to be voted on:

1. RESOLUTION NUMBER 2021-09- A Resolution of the Covington City Council Confirming the Reappointment of Jan Butler as the District D Appointment to the Covington Board of Adjustment for a Term of Five (5) Years. (Ludwig)

Councilman Ludwig acknowledged Ms. Butler and commended her dedication to the Board of Adjustments as well as several other boards around the city. She is extremely qualified and educated on all matters BOA related and we would love for her to continue her service to the Board of Adjustment.

Ms. Jan Butler stated it was an honor and a pleasure for Councilwoman Ludwig to reappoint her.

Councilman Botsford acknowledged the dedication of her own time to be on the BOA and it's greatly appreciated.

Councilman Smith stated that there is no doubt in his mind that she understands the responsibility of the BOA and will always do what is best for the city so congratulations.

Councilman Verret also thanked Ms. Butler for her service to the BOA.

There were no public comments on Resolution 2021-09.

Councilman Verret made a motion to adopt Resolution No. 2021-09. seconded by Botsford. Roll call was unanimous to adopt Resolution No. 2021-09. Resolution No. 2021-09 was adopted.

2. A Resolution of the Covington City Council Selecting the Official Journal for the City of Covington for a Term of One (1) Year. (Rolling)

There were no public comments on Resolution 2021-10.

Councilman Smith made a motion to adopt Resolution No. 2021-10, seconded by Councilwoman Ludwig. Roll call was unanimous to adopt Resolution No. 2021-10. Resolution No. 2021-10 was adopted.

COMMENTS AND REPORTS

Council District and Committee Reports:

1. District A-

Councilman Lewis was absent . Councilman Botsford reported on District A for Councilman Lewis. He stated a reminder for the Juneteenth Celebration on June 19, 2021 from 9am to 3pm at Reverend Peter Atkins Park. The schedule is as follows:

- 9:00am Freedom Parade led by the Soul Saints Super Fans
- 10:00am to 3:00pm is the Juneteenth Program including Games, Maypole, Dancing, Vendors, Music and Food. There will be performances by New Beginnings and Northwest Youth Tap Ensemble from Seattle, Washington
- 3:00pm will be a co-ed softball game hosted by the NAACP

A thank you to the St. Tammany Parish School Board for the backstop it really looks nice.

2. District B-

Councilman Botsford gave an update for the Food Bank; The Stats for May 2021 are 118 households and 120 boxes compared to May 2020 which was 139 so there was a drop which is encouraging. Year-to-date there is 7207 households that are served and 8154 boxes. The highlights is the ease of the Covid. They have opened their lobby where they are taking in-person registrations and recertifications by appointment. They are now loading cars once again with a mask mandate. If you do a in person interview in one of the bays, please wear your mask. They started off with a gift from “Gift Nola Day” tripling their 10,000 goal. The community really stepped up. Their golf tournament was rained out, but they still had a club house hosting with a fantastic turnout. In June, they have an event called SOS, “Stock Our Shelves” along with a promotion with the Blood Center. If any business is interested in holding a food and blood drive in June or July, please contact Ginger Kunkle, Community Engagement Manager at 985-327-0044. The Food Banks most needed items are canned beans, tomato sauce, corn bread mix, rice, soup and paper products.

3. District C-

Councilman Roberts gave a huge shoutout to Public works for the work they did on Menetre Street. They helped with some drainage which is going to improve a lot of what is happening on Menetre Street as far as water is concerned. He stated two main things he would like to address are: Utility Billing and the six month review of the budget. This budget was made during Covid and with all its protocol’s. Now things are a little more relaxed, he stated he thinks it’s a good time to look at the budget .

4. District D-

Councilwoman Ludwig stated she was going to let Mayor mark announce the events. She stated the new St. Tammany Hospital Cancer Center had their ribbon cutting. We now have several cancer centers within town which is wonderful to have. There is only one patient in Covid care at this time at STPH and there was a time in May for three days in a row there were none. The hospital is really excited about their “Be Well Bus”. It will bring healthcare to neighborhoods especially people who are homebound or issues with transportation. Their first event will be at the Juneteenth Celebration providing Covid vaccines as well as wellness outreach.

Remember the St. Tammany Parish Library is a great resource for kids. The reading program has kicked off. Also, a reminder that school is out and there a tons

of kids on the street especially walking to the park and the library so please drive accordingly

5. District E-

Councilman Verret stated he is getting increasing calls about the utility bills, and he is concerned about it. Some people are getting a final bill and it's not a final bill. Some get a duplicate bill. Although, when they are told it's not a "duplicate bill", it is a duplicate bill. Some are getting double billed and some get billed only for garbage. These residents are going to be mighty upset when they receive their next bill. He stated he has heard the bills are calculated differently and also it is not streamlined billing. This problem needs to be figured out because we are ordinance specific. So, we have to comply with the ordinance. It should be based on usage and common sense. There is not much confidence in that the utility bills are being calculated the right way. He stated that he wanted to bring this up now so the Council can work together with Administration in the next month to figure this out.

Mayor Johnson addressed the Council stating that we had a couple of employees that we felt could not contribute more to their workdays than what they were doing. One of the jobs was to read meters. When you can't get to all the meters, there is a way to estimate the bills. What was happening, more meters were being estimated than should have been so, when we held them accountable for it, they quit. If we were going to make them work, they were not going to stay with the city. There should be 4 meter technicians reading meters for the utility department. We had one senior tech and one trainee to read 5000 meters across the city, so this led to one route not being read for 45 to 50 days. This route received a minimum bill instead being billed for 30 days as you pointed out according to ordinance. The minimum bill was for 50 days so now, we are supposed to go again immediately two weeks later with another minimum bill. It is completely unfair for someone who uses a limited amount of water. So rather than giving them a bill for 50 days and another minimum bill two weeks later they were charged for trash only and the next bill will pick up and be within the 30 day period. We have hired one new meter technician and we have an application for another one. Rouses has signs out. Copelands has signs out. Coastal Trash has trucks that are parked because they can't get CDL drivers so, we're having the same problems in the city getting qualified employees at the rates we are paying. The problem was caused by employees not carrying their weight. Those employees have left, and we have already brought in one more and we are looking for the fourth. That is what it's going to take. He stated he agrees with the council, it's been a mess and the route that was charged with garbage only had a note on the bill from the Mayor explaining exactly what happened. We do have a problem and it continues to be an ongoing problem but, we do continue to address it on a daily basis.

Councilman Roberts stated that his concern moving forward is that the council knew practically nothing about the meter technicians quitting and that there was going to be some kind of downfall to this issue. He asked the Mayor to at least give the council a heads up on the fact that there was going to be a lot of phone calls that they were going to get on this issue. He asked the mayor what it was going to look like on this upcoming bill and if it was going to affect the budget and how much. That's going to be the biggest concern. That was revenue that was not generated. It's got to be generated because it's a water flow.

Mayor Johnson stated he did not think it worked out that way. The average worked out and generated revenue.

Councilman Botsford asked with the previous administration we were installing new meters. Where are we now with that?

Mayor Mark stated that is one of the reasons the meter technicians quit. Yes, we have the meters, and they were supposed to be installing these meters.

Councilman Botsford asked if there was a time limit to install the meters?

Mayor Johnson responded saying no. The new Meter technicians that are hired will have to be trained on the installation of the meters.

6. At Large (Smith)-

Councilman at Large Smith ask who is accountable at City Hall for maintaining enough meter readers? He would still need a little clarification as to those people that were waived fees except for garbage, on what they can expect on the next billing on the next 30 day cycle.

Mayor Johnson the fees are not waived for long periods of time. They will be charged for all the water. It's just the minimum fee won't be charged for two weeks then two weeks later.

Councilman Smith asked **Mayor Johnson** if he believed other municipalities in the area are having the same problem?

Mayor Johnson responded stating that he knows they are having the same problems with employment. He also stated another challenge we are faced with is the software that reads the meters and analyzes how much the water usage is. The software doesn't always talk to the company that has the billing software. It's two different programs. Another thing the council and everyone needs to know is that in the right hand corner of the bill there is a service period date that is not always accurate. It's been that way.

Council President Rolling stated he would ask the Mayor and Administration to communicate with the council if there is a problem. The communication must improve. The council would like to know a little bit of a heads up when calls come in and what the problems are ahead of time and how the Council can help.

7. At Large (President)-

Council President Rolling gave a recognition to the CBA stating they do a great job educating business communities and having everyone engage with businesses opening up. He thanked the CBA for they are a great part of the city. One last thing is Carnival in Covington. It is right around the corner. March 1, 2022 is Mardi Gras day in the city of Covington. This is going to be the biggest and best ever the city and parish will ever see. Our board is working extremely hard behind the scenes. We will have an outlet from the media a press release going out.

Councilman Smith had a question to administration asking how proactive and how hard we are trying to recruit lifeguards so the kids in the city can use the pool this summer. I know it has been difficult tracking lifeguards. He stated he had suggested putting the word out to Covington High School, Saint Scholastica Academy and Saint Paul's.

Erin Bivona, Chief Administration Officer stated that they have been working on it and will have Human Resources reach out to them and let them know what has been done.

Administrative Comments and Reports

1. **Mayor Johnson** gave an overview of all the upcoming events in the City of Covington as follows:
 - (a) He reminded everyone of the Farmers Market every Saturday from 9:00am to 1:00pm across from cemetery No. 1. It's a great time to go to the Farmers market. They have some wonderful produce there, a lot of variety and a lot of music every Saturday morning. Every Wednesday they are at the Covington Trailhead. The live music is provided by the Northshore Traditional Music

Society. They are getting more into the music scene here in Covington. They are at the Art Market on Lee Lane the first Saturday of each month. They did the Antiques and Uniques Festival this year and they will also be performing in, "Sparks In The Park".

- (b) "Taste of Covington" is going on right now. This is put on by the CBA.
- (c) St. Tammany Parish Library is joining with the city to put together story time for the children called, "Tails and Tales" which will be on Tuesdays, June 8, 15, 22, 29 and July 6 from 10:30 to 11:30am at the Trailhead.
- (d) This Sunday will be, "Zumba with the Mayor" at Bogue Falaya Hall. The Mayor will be out of town, but the five instructors will be there to keep things moving.
- (e) Chef Soirée will be coming up this Sunday June 13, 2021 at Bogue Falaya Park. There has been a lot of work going at the park. Its looking beautiful.
- (f) Sunset at the Landing, Friday, June 18, 2021 6:00pm to 9:00pm. The location will be determined as the City continues with their sidewalk improvements.
- (g) Juneteenth Celebration on Saturday, June 19, 2021
- (h) Columbia Street Block Party, Friday June 25, 2021 from 6:00pm to 9:00pm.
- (i) Rotary Club Quackfalaya on June 26, 2021. Each ticket bought represents a rubber duck for \$20.00 and they all get put into the Bogue Falaya River to race. The first one that finishes receives \$1000.00. All proceeds go to Non-Profits in the community including the Boys and Girls Club of Covington, Keep Covington Beautiful, Miracle League Northshore, NAMI, Pontchartrain Conservancy, Safe Harbor, Safe Haven, and the Covington Rotary Foundation.
- (j) He stated: As we approach the mid-point of 2021, there are several adjustments I suggest we consider in the budget regarding salaries and projects. Since last Spring, our sales tax revenue has increased about \$800,000 per year. Our utility revenue has increased about \$880,000 per year. Additionally, when we budgeted for 2021, we were very conservative in our spending. Our current unassigned fund balance is, pending year 2020 close-out, about \$5,000,000.

1) Planning Director Nahketah Bagby has given us her one year notice. I suggest we create a new position of Assistant Director (cost of salary with benefits = \$95,000 per year). This new employee would be trained by Nahketah through next Spring and upon Nahketah's departure assume the role of Planning Director. The position of Assistant Director would then be dissolved.

2) All City employees remain underpaid compared to the labor market. This is particularly true of those at the lowest end of the scale. I propose a raise of \$1,000 per year per employee (\$94,000 for the remainder of this year, \$188,000 additional cost next year). Additionally, another \$2,000 per year for Quenton Belanger (IT Director) and for Eugenie Leggio (HR Director). Sidenote: Yes, this would include Police. Since the Council approved the raise last year, both the Sheriff's Department and the Slidell Police Department are implementing raises.

3) Complete Design of Sewer Point Repairs and Lining in River Forest (\$150,000) - Smoke testing and video of sewer lines in River Forest has been completed. The data collected in this process is time sensitive i.e., if the repair work is not done within a couple of years smoke and video will need to be repeated. This has happened to us in the past. I propose we begin the process of completing the design

phase of the process before the end of this year with the idea we budget for the actual repairs in year 2022.

4) Harrison and 11th Ave - Earlier this year residents brought to my attention a hazardous ditch adjacent to Harrison Street at 11th Ave (across from the Emergency Room). I met onsite with Public Works, and we considered several options to repair. We concluded that all of our "fixes" were insufficient. Currently, the asphalt edge of Harrison is actually sloughing off into the ditch. Public Works recommends we engineer and build subsurface drainage in the ditch and create a safe road shoulder. Estimated costs: \$35,000 for design, \$85,000 for construction.

5) Replenish Public Works budget for emergency sewer line repairs (\$250,000). The 2021 budget amount of \$150,000 has been used due to sewer line collapse at Rutland / Jahncke (\$78,000) and the disintegration of concrete sewer line underneath N. Taylor Street (servicing Ozone, \$123,000). Public Works' concern is if N. Taylor continues to disintegrate, we will need to replace a few blocks of line. It would be important to have emergency funds on hand.

6) Hebert Lane Drainage - A 42" subsurface drainage culvert which services downtown has failed. It has separated in several consecutive joints. This repair will be similar to the one on Lockwood adjacent the Tap Room. Engineering design is estimated at \$80,000.

Councilman Roberts had asked about the year-to-date budget.

Mayor Johnson suggest that we have either a Committee meeting or a Council work session where we could then visit on these suggestions more fully. Staff could be on hand to answer questions.

Councilman Rolling agreed to the work session and suggested to go ahead and plan the date at the meeting. He suggested Tuesday, June 22, 2021 at 5:30pm in the Council Chambers.

Councilman Smith requested the Mayor forward to each Councilman the list of adjustments he had just read for the budget.

Councilman Roberts thanked the Mayor for addressing the budget.

Councilman Verret stated that when the Council receives the notes from administration that they will probably have some more issues to discuss related to the budget.

2. Erin Bivona, Chief Administrative Officer- None

Councilman President Rolling reminded everyone that the July Council Meeting is scheduled for the second Tuesday, July 13, 2021 at 6pm.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:55pm.

/s/ _____
LARRY ROLLING
Council President

/s/ _____
JOANN RUCKER
Council Clerk