

CITY OF COVINGTON
COVINGTON CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

August 03, 2021

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

Roll call was as follows:

PRESENT: Councilman Peter Lewis Sr., Councilman John Botsford, Councilman Mark W. Verret, Councilman Joey Roberts, Councilwoman Cody Ludwig, Councilman-At -Large, Vice President Rick Smith, and Councilman At Large, President Larry Rolling.

ABSENT: None

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

A Moment of Silence was observed.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Sheriff Randy Smith.

APPEARERS

Councilman Botsford introduced Mr. Thomas Mitchell, LPC from the Hope House. Mr. Thomas explained , the Hope House collects all the forensic evidence for any child crime that happens within the 22nd judicial district. He stated, “ We are a healing environment for children”. Mr. Mitchel asked that the City of Covington to support Hope House through a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement as we did a few years ago. Ms. Gia Baker, past President of the Board of Directors and Ms. Holly Boullion, Current President of the Board of Directors at The Hope House made brief statements. There was a discussion about the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement from the Council and also comments from Mayor Mark.

Councilman at Large Smith introduced Mr. Chris Jean with Stand Up St. Tammany. Mr. Jean showed a video on the proposed Casino that is contemplating to be built in Slidell. Mr. Jean presented his concerns for the building of the Casino and the negative effects it would have not only to Slidell, but to the entire St. Tammany Parish. Sheriff Randy Smith and Slidell Police Chief Randy Fandel also gave their concerns against the proposed casino.

CONSENT CALENDAR

Councilman Roberts made a motion to adopt the consent calendar, seconded by Councilman Botsford. Roll Call: Yeas-7 Nays-0 Absent-0 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. 2021-07-01- An Ordinance of the City of Covington Declaring Surplus Certain Vehicles and Equipment Owned by the City of Covington (Rolling)

City Attorney Rod Rodrigue, gave an overview of Item #2021-07-01.

Mrs. Erin Bivona, Chief Administrative Officer made a brief comment.

Mr. Lance Bonham, a resident in Covington asked if the City of Covington was going to get a tax credit for surplus.

City Attorney , Rod Rodrigue explained we are Tax Exempt.

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

Councilman Verret made a motion to adopt Item No. 2021-07-01 **seconded by Councilwoman Ludwig. Roll Call was unanimous to adopt Item No. 2021-07-01.**

Item No. 2020-07-01 was adopted.

2. PUBLIC HEARING ACTION ON NO. 2021-07-02- An Ordinance of the City of Covington Declaring Surplus Property Owned By the City of Covington and Authorizing the Mayor to Execute Any and All Documents in Connection with the Donation of Said Surplus Property to the Village Of Sun Police Department (Verret)

Councilman Verret gave an overview of the proposed Ordinance.

Councilman Smith 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 Botsford made a motion to adopt Item No. 2021-07-02 **seconded by Councilman Smith. Roll Call was unanimous to adopt Item No. 2021-07-02. Item No. 2020-07-02 was adopted.**

3. PUBLIC HEARING ACTION ON NO. 2021-07-03- An Ordinance of the City of Covington Declaring Surplus Property Owned by the City of Covington and Authorizing the Mayor to Execute Any and All Documents in Connection with the Donation of Said Surplus Property to the City of Madisonville Police Department (Verret)

Councilman Verret gave an overview of the proposed Ordinance.

Councilman Botsford 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. 2021-07-03 **seconded by Councilman Smith. Roll Call was unanimous to adopt Item No. 2021-07-03. Item No. 2020-07-03 was adopted.**

4. PUBLIC HEARING ACTION ON NO. 2021-07-04- An ordinance of the City of Covington Amending the 2021 Operating and Capital Budget(Botsford)

Councilman Botsford gave a brief explanation of Item # 2021-07-04.

Mayor Mark Johnson gave a detailed explanation of Item # 2021-07-04.

Mrs. Erin Bivona, Chief Administrative Officer explained some corrections made to the Ordinance.

Council President Rolling read these changes.

Councilman Verret stated we value our employees. The Council and Administration has stepped up and rose to the occasion for our employees. He stated for the record, "The City of Covington is a great place to live and a great place to work."

Councilman Botsford stated the best thing in this Ordinance is the increase of salary for our city employees. The employees did not get a raise last year, so we are making up for it this year and they truly deserve it.

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

Councilman Verret made a motion to adopt Item No. 2021-07-04 **seconded by Councilwoman Ludwig**. Roll Call was unanimous to adopt Item No. 2021-07-04.

Item No. 2020-07-04 was adopted.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Items removed from the consent calendar: None.

B. Items to be voted on:

- 1. RESOLUTION NUMBER 2021-11** A Resolution of the Covington City Council Confirming the Councilman At Large Re-Appointment of Jim LaCroix to the Covington Tree Board for A Term of Three (3) Years. (Rolling)

There were no public comments on Resolution 2021-11.

Mayor Mark Johnson wanted to thank all of the people that are up for re-appointment for commitment and time. He stated some of the work the tree board has been doing.

Councilman Botsford made a motion to adopt Resolution No. 2021-11, **seconded by Councilman Smith**. Roll call was unanimous to adopt Resolution No. 2021-11. Resolution No. 2021-11 was adopted.

- 2. RESOLUTION NUMBER 2021-12** A Resolution of the Covington City Council Confirming the Mayoral Re-Appointment of Bruce E. Davidson to the Covington Tree Board for a Three (3) Year Term. (Mayor)

There were no public comments on Resolution 2021-12.

Councilwoman Ludwig made a motion to adopt Resolution No. 2021-12, **seconded by Councilman Lewis**. Roll call was unanimous to adopt Resolution No. 2021-12. Resolution No. 2021-12 was adopted.

- 3. RESOLUTION NUMBER 2021-13** A Resolution of the Covington City Council Confirming the Mayoral Re-Appointment of Emily Couvillion to the Covington Tree Board for a Three (3) Year Term. (Mayor)

There were no public comments on Resolution 2021-13.

Councilman Smith made a motion to adopt Resolution No. 2021-13, seconded by Councilman Roberts. Roll call was unanimous to adopt Resolution No. 2021-13. Resolution No. 2021-13 was adopted.

- 4. RESOLUTION NUMBER 2021-14** A Resolution of the Covington City Council Confirming the Mayoral Re-Appointment of Billie Stanga to the Covington Tree Board for a Three (3) Year Term. (Mayor)

There were no public comments on Resolution 2021-14.

Councilman Botsford made a motion to adopt Resolution No. 2021-14, seconded by Councilman Smith. Roll call was unanimous to adopt Resolution No. 2021-14. Resolution No. 2021-14 was adopted.

- 5. RESOLUTION NUMBER 2021-15** A Resolution of the Covington City Council Confirming the Capital Outlay and Encumbrance Rollovers From the 2020 Budget to the 2021 Budget (Smith)

Councilman At Large Smith made a brief statement.

There were no public comments on Resolution 2021-15.

Councilman Smith made a motion to adopt Resolution No. 2021-15, seconded by Councilman Verret. Roll call was unanimous to adopt Resolution No. 2021-15. Resolution No. 2021-15 was adopted.

C. Items for discussion: The Recent Violence in the City of Covington (Lewis)- **Councilman Lewis** lead the discussion stating he would like to thank the Administration, Council, Chief of Police and the Police Department in dealing with the recent violence in District A. Councilman Lewis stated that since he has taken office he has worked very closely with this Council and the Safety Committee trying to curve the violence in District A and feels they've made very little progress, but we have not given up. The fight still goes on. He stated he is frustrated because this is not the place, he expected Covington to be at this point. He expected more from the community and the parents and the adults in this community. He stated he does expect the police to be the force of the community, but they cannot do it all by themselves. It's going to take the community to help the police when they are not around. He stated that when he looks around the room he is frustrated because he is receiving calls from residents in District A that they want to be present to discuss the violence and it is on his agenda tonight and no one is here at the meeting . He thanked Chief of Police Ferrell for taking his calls and texts and also Administration. A young man's life was lost to gun violence, and it continued the day after. We will keep moving forward and rid this violence out of Covington.

Ashley Russell, a citizen in the community made a brief comment on this matter.

Councilman Botsford stated he appreciated Councilman Lewis's passion on this matter. It is the understanding our Police Department will be fully staffed this month and this will help the situation. He agreed with Councilman Lewis stating is going to be a community effort.

Councilman At Large Smith stated it is frustrating and if Councilman Lewis had suggestions on how the Council can get more involved and participate, he is in full support of any suggestions Councilman Lewis has to move forward.

Councilman Lewis stated the kids need something to do after school. The idle time is what gets them in trouble. We really need to act on this now.

Councilwoman Ludwig also made a brief comment and stated she is one hundred percent onboard on figuring out something physically with more action of what we could do to have activities.

Councilman Verret stated that the passion is alive and well in Covington and the discussion with our new police chief and the resources that have been provided by this Council and Administration are going to make a difference. He stated that we have to be cognitive of the issues that are in each district.

Councilman Roberts stated he appreciates Councilman's Lewis passion for making things better. The number one thing is the Communication process between the residents, police, Administration and the Council. To prosecute people, you have to be brave enough to stand against crime. He stated he knows the risk and fear. Love will beat hate every day. When you put enough people in the community to do that, change will come.

Council President Rolling stated with that being said, this was a great discussion and a great passion. We are all on the same boat in this Council wanting things better for every part of the city. We have the opportunity to move forward with the resources in place.

COMMENTS AND REPORTS

A. Council District and Committee Reports:

1. District A -

Councilman Lewis-None

2. District B –

Councilman Botsford gave an update on the Food Bank. He stated they are open on the second and fourth Saturday of every month. They are open from 9:00am to 12:00pm for distribution and new client registration by appointment only. They are following the COVID-19 protocol including the retail shop. In the month of July, there was an increase of 44 houses. The new T-2 food boxes for the diabetic program have had a huge interest. They are healthy boxes including low sodium and whole grains for households facing diabetes. The traditional summer stock bags have been being distributed for the school age youth clients. So far, they have distributed 1000 of these kid packs. These packages are a supplement for the loss of school breakfast and lunch during the summer for these kids. Summer months are always slow for donations so, if you could get the word out in your community please donate. There are donations boxes around the city including Aquistapaces. Their August most needed items are as follows: tuna, corn, peas, cooking oil, can or dried beans. The average for July 2021 was 93 households with 102 boxes daily. The year to date totals is 10, 285 households and 11,490 boxes. The Food Bank services all throughout St. Tammany Parish. The

- last thing is a reminder that school is coming back in session so little kids will be out there and the school buses, so everyone remember to slow your roll and keep your eyes out for the kids out and about.
3. **District C –**
Councilman Roberts stated there are three things . 1. The water bill discrepancy seems to be kind of ironing itself out, but he noted there are still some things that are off. 2. Councilman Botsford mentioned school is starting so, please be mindful of speed limits in the school zones. He mentioned he has spoke with the Chief Ferrell concerning Kehoe France School, which is in his district and the drivers dropping their children off ,disregard speed limits and stop signs every morning. 3. Concerning the Patricia Drive scenario, he stated he would like to commend Callie Baker, City Engineer and Mayor Johnson for dealing with this issue. He asked to please keep him in the loop. Hopefully there is some progress coming.
 4. **District D –**
Councilwoman Ludwig stated St. Tammany Hospital has 92 patients in COVID care as of today. Statewide 89% of people in COVID care in hospitals are unvaccinated. Please take responsibility and put your sleeves up so we can get those numbers down.
 5. **District E –**
Councilman Verret reiterated the comment Councilwoman Ludwig stated saying if you are unvaccinated , please consider getting vaccinated. A reminder kids will be going back to school so please recognize we are a small community . Please keep a lookout and be cognizant and slow down.
 6. **At Large (Smith)**
Councilman At Large Smith stated he was very impressed how quickly the Covington Police found the suspects in the recent shooting in Covington. The overlay project on Boston Street looks wonderful. There was a life threatening situation on Columbia Street and Polk Ave. from a dead tree leaning on a smaller tree waiting to fall. It was discovered by Dr. Malcom Guidry, Arborist and Wayne Mayberry , Code Enforcer. They took care of it immediately with Administrations help so Kudos to both for there quick response.
 7. **At Large (President)**
Council President Rolling stated he appreciated Councilman Smith mentioning the new overlay on Boston Street . It is nice and smooth now. There will be a CBA meeting tomorrow night at the 19th Hole located at 1645 Hwy 190 . The meeting will start at 5:30pm. He stated the CBA does a great job for all of our businesses. Please support our local businesses.

Administrative Comments and Reports

1. **Mayor Johnson**
 - a) He thanked the Council for their consideration of the mid-year budget adjustments.
 - b) He also thanked the Council once again for the four -thousand dollar per year, per officer raise for the Police Officers raise that was enacted in August of last year. When that raise was put into place, we had 26

patrol officer positions and we had 13 filled. We did not have an adequate staffed police department. In the subsequent to that raise , we received 60 applications for the Covington PD. We were able to choose some of the best of the best and we've had cadets go through the academy in January of this year and we will be fully staffed by the end of the summer. We are going to have 26 patrol officers in 26 slots and instead of having three officer's man the city in a 12 hour shift we will have five during the day and six at night. It is police presence that makes a difference.

- c) He gave a follow up on Boston Street saying we always are grateful to Senator Patrick MacMath and Representative Mark Wright. The state funded the Overlay project. Also, a thanks to Callie Baker, City Engineer and her staff for overseeing the project. The City administrated the contract, and they did a great job. With that in mind we hope into the budget year for 2022 to include repaving Rutland Street. The subterranean infrastructure repair is just about complete on Rutland. He also stated that during the 2022 budget. he hoped for the subterranean infrastructure of Gibson Street including fixing all the sewer lines, water lines, and the drain lines. There is significant drainage failure on Gibson Street. In 2023, we will budget for the paving.
- d) He stated as far as events, the month of August is kind of light. We have White Linen Covington for the Covington Art, the Ultimate Tailgate. We will have to follow closely what the guidelines are and what we will be able to participate in.

2. Erin Bivona, Chief Administrative Officer/Director of Administration-None

Councilman President Rolling stated he appreciated Mayor Johnson mentioning again about the financial situation with the police and appreciated his lead on that. He stated that history has shown that the Council has supported anything that is needed for our community. The September Council Meeting is scheduled for the second Tuesday, September 14, 2021 at 6pm.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:28 PM.

/s/ _____
LARRY ROLLING
Council President

/s/ _____
JOANN RUCKER
Council Clerk