

**CITY OF COVINGTON
COVINGTON CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

July 19, 2022

Council President Rolling called the regular meeting to order at 6:02pm.

Roll call was as follows:

PRESENT: Councilman Peter Lewis Sr., Councilman John Botsford, Councilman Joey Roberts, Councilwoman Cody Ludwig, Councilman Mark W. Verret, 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 .

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Councilman Rick Smith.

Councilman at Large read from the Charter on the process of yearly election of the Council President and the Council Vice President.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

A. Council President-

Councilman at Large Rick Smith nominated Councilman at Large Larry Rolling for Council President. Councilman Botsford seconded the motion. Roll Call: Yeas-6 Nays-0 Abstained-1. Councilman Rolling was elected President of the Covington City Council.

B. Council Vice President-

Councilman Botsford nominated Councilman at Large Rick Smith for Council Vice President. Councilman Roberts seconded the motion. Roll Call: Yeas-6 Nays-0 Abstained-1. Councilman Smith was elected Vice-President of the Covington City Council.

Recognition of Retirement- Councilman Rolling stated we have a celebration for Ms. Brenda Willis in recognition for her retirement from the St. Tammany Parish Farmer for her service of fifty years and nine months. Councilman Rolling presented her with a plaque of appreciation for her service and dedication to the City of Covington and the Covington City Council.

APPEARERS:

- 1. Mrs. Julie Agan who is the Executive Director for Council on Aging** spoke on the programs COAST has to offer.
- 2. Councilman Mrs. Alice Couvillion, a citizen in the City of Covington** who has lived in Covington for 41 ½ years, spoke of her concerns involving the events in Bogue Falaya Park. She requests a solution of the parking situation during these events. Mayor Mark stated the park is no longer available to rent as a

whole. The exceptions are Chef Soiree', Blues Berry Jazz Festival and Monster Mash which have been grandfathered in. He also stated he will address the parking.

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

A. Items to be voted on:

- 1. PUBLIC HEARING AND ACTION ON NO. 2022-06-02-** An Ordinance of the City of Covington Levying, Imposing and Adopting the Millage Rates on all property Subject to Taxation in the City of Covington, State of Louisiana, for the Year 2022 (Smith)

Councilman Smith gave an overview of Item No. 2022-06-02. **Nina Sweeney, Director of Finance** explained the Millage and stated we will not be rolling up and we will be staying the same.

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. 2022-06-02 seconded by Councilman Ludwig. Roll Call was unanimous to adopt Item No. 2022-06-02. Item No. 2022-06-02 was adopted.

- 2. PUBLIC HEARING ACTION ON NO. 2022-06-03-** An Ordinance of the City of Covington to Amend the 2022 Operating and Capital Budget (Smith)
Councilman Smith gave an overview of Item No. 2022-06-03. **Mrs. Erin Bivona** gave a detailed explanation of the amendments on Item No. 2022-06-03. She also stated all Department heads were in attendance if Council had any questions.
Councilman Botsford asked why the overtime for the Fire Department and the Police Department has gone up? **Assistant Fire Chief Steven Michell** and **Stephen Culotta, Deputy Chief** of the Covington Police Department explained.
Councilman Smith asked if the school Board and the Private schools were going to reimburse the City of Covington for the Resource Officers. **Mrs. Bivona** stated yes.
Councilman Verret asked about the increases differences for the Trailhead , Firehouse event Center and Greater Covington Center. Mrs. Bivona explained concerning the insurance. **Councilman Smith** stated it is due to the appraised value of the buildings. Councilman Verret asked about the new rescue unit. **Assistant Fire Chief Steven Michell** explained. **Councilman Verret** asked what the increase was for the Bogue Falaya Park Bathrooms. **Ms. Amy Tucker , Director of Facilities** and **Callie Baker, City Engineer** explained. **Councilman Lewis** had several questions including the cemetery sidewalk and the Ozone Park fence. **Ms. Callie Baker, City Engineer** explained the cost and the increase in the cost of the fence.

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 Smith made a motion to amend the Ordinance with accordance to the attached on Item No. 2022-06-03 seconded by Councilman Botsford.

Roll Call was unanimous to amend Item No. 2022-06-03.

Councilman Verret made a motion to adopt amended Item 2022-06-03 seconded by Councilman Smith.

Roll Call was unanimous to adopt Item No. 2022-06-03.

Item No. 2022-06-03 was adopted.

3. Items for Discussion: None

NEW BUSINESS

A. Items removed from the consent calendar: None.

B. Items to be voted on:

1. RESOLUTION NO. 2022-13 A Resolution of the Covington City Council Acknowledging Receipt and Compliance with the Louisiana Attestation Questionnaire from the Legislative Auditor's Office (Smith)

Councilman Smith gave an overview of Resolution 2022-13.

Mrs. Erin Bivona, CAO made a brief comment.

Councilman Botsford made a motion to adopt Resolution No. 2022-13, seconded by Councilman Smith. Roll call was unanimous to adopt Resolution No. 2022-13. Resolution No. 2022-13 was adopted.

3. RESOLUTION NO. 2022-14 A Resolution of the Covington City Council Authorizing the mayor to Enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement with the St. Tammany Parish School Board for the Provision of Schools resource Officers at All Public Schools within Covington City Limits (Verret)

Councilman Verret gave an overview of Resolution No. 2022-14.

Mrs. Erin Bivona, CAO made a brief comment.

Councilman Verret made a motion to adopt Resolution No. 2022-14, seconded by Councilman Smith. Roll call was unanimous to adopt Resolution No. 2022-14. Resolution No. 2022-14 was adopted.

4. RESOLUTION NO. 2022-15 A Resolution of the Covington City Council Authorizing the Mayor to Execute a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement with the State of Louisiana for State Capital Outlay Funding for Downtown Historic District Overlays (FP&C Project No. 50-M57-21-01) (Smith)

Councilman Smith Stated this is the opportunity to receive \$80000.00 in the historic district. **Mayor Johnson** stated that the 80,000 is strictly for the design work for an asphalt overlay in repairing the subsurface drainage and the subsurface infrastructure under Lee Lane, Gibson Street and Rutland Street. This will also put us in line for an additional grant from the state for \$1,000,000 and also a second grant from the state for \$2 million. This is the start of the procurement process which is long and tedious.

Councilman Roberts made a motion to adopt Resolution No. 2022-15, seconded by Councilman Verret. Roll call was unanimous to adopt Resolution No. 2022-15. Resolution No. 2022-15 was adopted.

5. RESOLUTION NO. 2022-16 A Resolution Ordering and calling a Special Election to be Held in the City of Covington, State of Louisiana, to Authorize the Renewal of an Ad Valorem Tax Therein and to Authorize the Incurring of Debt and Issuance of Bonds Therein; Making Application to the State Bond Commission; and Providing for Other Matters Connection Therewith. (Smith) **Councilman Smith** stated that this is a resolution from the City Council making an election call to renew an ad valorem tax that helps pay for Proposition One that will be on the ballot on December 10th 2022. Proposition One is to renew a millage that helps the city pay for fire services that the City Fire Department provides. The mileage needs to be renewed in order for us to provide that service without depleting our general fund. The second proposition will be asking the voters to renew a bond and that bond basically gives the city the opportunity to do street and road approvment's, public buildings, recreation facilities, drainage, and the issues that we have. This is not an increase to the voters. It is basically renewing what is about to expire to maintain those services.

Ms. Nina Sweeny, Director of Finance gave an addition explanation to Resolution 2022-16.

Mr. Harley Andrews, Attorney for Foley & Judell, LLP gave a brief Overview on the Resolution 2022-16.

Councilman Smith made a motion to adopt Resolution No. 2022-16, seconded by Councilman Botsford. Roll call was unanimous to adopt Resolution No. 2022-16. Resolution No. 2022-16 was adopted.

C. Items for Discussion:

Mrs. Erin Bivona, Chief Administrative Officer gave a thorough report on hiring a contracted service for IT and dissolved the in house IT department and the three employees in that department. The consultant that was hired is Telecom. She introduced Mr. Andre White, Senior Business Account Executive for governmental representation for Telecom. He gave an overview of the company and answered questions from the Council. He introduced Mr. Jimmy Burns, Chief Operations Officer of Telecom. Mr. Burns also answered questions from the Council. Mr. Burns introduced Ms. Jean Hoover who will be our in house IT consultant.

COMMENTS AND REPORTS

A. Council District and Committee Reports:

1. District E -

Councilman Verret congratulated both of our leaders on the Council for doing a great job. He stated that this Council has risen to the occasion every time. He thanked Administration for answering the tough questions presented to them concerning the amended budget and having the mid-year budget adjustment. He stated there is a lot to be done. The Menetre boat launch is on his radar. Also, Jahncke Ave. and New Hampshire Street. He stated the whole city has issues, and we are trying to address it. There is only a limited amount of money. We are all here to do the right thing so let's keep Covington rolling.

2. District D –

Councilwoman Ludwig stated St. Tammany Parish Hospital currently has 28 Covid Hospitalizations. She stated the St. Tammany Parish Library is offering SAT and ACT test prep courses through www.lahomework.org. She stated with the upcoming school year, please be mindful of school zones, traffic crossings and general speeding . Kudos to the Covington Fire Department for the multiple calls she seems to be receiving for gas leaks.

3. District C –

Councilman Roberts stated District C is doing great. He wanted to give a shout out to public works for responding every time he calls. There is process on the Lurling Street project. He stated he called Coastal because of all the green waste that has been sitting on the streets for awhile and they are suffering like everyone else for lack of employees. They are asking for patience but after a week he stated he spoke with them and they came and picked up the green waste. They are doing the best they can. Sarada and Amy and also the Covington Concert Band did a great job with Sparks in the Park. He wanted to give Diane Weiss a shout out for the Four on the Fourth. On September 10, there is a Never Forget Run in the support of the Tunnels for Towers Foundation for Fire Fighters. It will be from 8:00am to noon at the Covington Trailhead. This reflects how important our firefighters are to our community and what they do to risk their lives for people every day. As far as our school resource officers, they are the ones that are the response and intercept to any variable to any kind of school situation. He thanked the police officers and Chief Farrell for this.

4. District B –

Councilman Botsford gave his food bank update including the average houses for June were 87 daily households served and 106 daily boxes went out. The total for June was 1048 total households and 1266 total boxes. Their numbers are down about 40% which summer is always a slow time for the food bank. If all the businesses could do a food drive that would be great. He stated his wife did a food drive at a business she goes to, and the response was overflowing. Volunteers are also needed at the food bank. The most needed items are low grain food items, canned vegetables, canned fruits, cereal, and rice. They are also doing their diabetic boxes. District B is doing great. He wished Mayor Mark a belated Happy Birthday.

5. District A –

Councilman Lewis stated he wanted to talk about two events that have passed including our Resource Expo Exchange which is the first time this event was put on for Covington and he wanted to give a big shout out to the Southern Hotel for their support. This expo was where non-profits come together and take about resources that we could supply to the city and community. The second event was Junteenth. The first day was great with the parade and entertainment. We had our first fashion show for our youth and words cannot express what he seen in these young kids as they walked on the runway. The pride in themselves was amazing. Ms. Tracy Dundas who does fashion week in New Orleans. At the end of the event, we were able to present four of them with scholarships that had to be used for education advancement. He thanked Amy Tucker for her help

with the Furman Auditorium. He also thanked his , donors including Bounce Back Nutrition, MSH Architects, Aquistapaces, Docucenter, Starlight Baptist Church, VFW Post 7286, Community Church and STARC.

6. Councilman At Large (Vice President)

Councilman Smith thanked council clerk JoAnn Rucker for her hard work putting together the meeting for this week. Thanked COAST for the services they provide for the community.

7. Councilman At Large (President)

Council President Rolling also thanked Council Clerk JoAnn Rucker for the she does a lot behind the scenes. The 13th annual Red Beans and Rice Cookoff for the United Way Campaign will be on Monday, July 25 from 11:00am to 2:00pm at the Greater Covington Center at 317 Jefferson Avenu in Covington. He acknowledged Councilman Lewis and his hard work he did for the celebration of Juneteenth. He stated we are lucky in that we have a lot of community sponsors. The CBA is a big part of that. We are very thankful and blessed for that. He thanked **Councilman Roberts** for providing the music for the events at Sparks in the Park as the DJ and we appreciate the YMCA and him for what they do. **Councilman Roberts** added the winner of the Hot Dog eating contest ate nine hotdogs in five minutes. **Councilman Rolling** thanked all the City of Covington Department heads for being at the meeting tonight and clarify some things for the budget amendment. He stated **Erin Bivona , CAO** prepares very hard for these Budget Amendments and there is a lot of questions. Inflation is real and it is affecting us all. He stated the Louisiana Municipal Association is having their annual Conference next week on July 28, 29 and 30th and we will be well represented for the City of Covington.

Administrative Comments and Reports

1. Mayor Mark Johnson

- a. He wanted to touch base on our last performance of the On Stage event for this season. It is a wonderful series of events that take place at the Furman Auditorium. Typically, these acts are from out-of-state professional entertainers that normally appear in Vegas, Branson Missouri and on cruise ships. The young man that played last Thursday night has been on the Ellen show and Nickelodeon. He did some fantastic Elvis Presley, and he played the piano like Jerry Lee Lewis, and he is only 14 years old. He also stated he would like to mention that the city did this in conjunction with the Slidell Cultural Arts Department. He stated Sarada Bonnett, City of Covington Cultural Arts Director and I went to Slidell a couple of months ago and met with Cutting Edge Theater who informed them about Finley Watkins. Finley played Covington on Thursday night and then played a show in Slidell on Friday and Saturday night. We are starting to team up with our companion cities so that we can bring these acts in. The next season for On Stage will begin in September. There will be 4 shows. Individual tickets are \$20.00. A season passport with a reserve seat is \$200. you can For more information contact Sarada Bonnett, Cultural Arts and Events Director at the Covington Trailhead. Coming in September is a Hank Williams Sr. Tribute and in December it will be the hilarious, “ You Smarter than your 8th grade Catholic Nun”.

- b. He also stated that on Saturday evening, the Covington Heritage Foundation put on a very nice show, “Characters of Covington”. We had a couple of our more seasoned residents share some of the stories from the 20th century and a mid-20th century going all the way back to the icehouse before refrigeration and dating on horseback. He stated he would like to give a shout out to Councilman Verret who has taken over as the President of the Covington Heritage Foundation. They have a great board now and I think membership renew will be coming up shortly, whisperings will be back this year in October and the History and Holly home tour in December. The Farm to Table Event back in the spring was phenomenal. The Covington Heritage Foundation has come out the gate strong and he stated he is happy to see that again.
- c. He wanted to give a shout out to Councilman Roberts for DJing at Sparks in the Park. He thanked American bank for being the primary sponsor of Sparks in the Park. As always, the Covington Concert Band was just phenomenal.
- d. He thanked the City Council for approving the budget amendment. He stated he appreciated their confidence in the Administration, Public Works Department, Police Department, and the Fire Department. He stated that the annual midyear budget adjustment which began last year, has proven to make city government move a tad bit quicker and a tad bit more efficient. He stated much of the budget amendment was aimed at rising cost of fuels and materials but what it did not address in the amendment is the effect of inflation on employee salaries. The devaluation of employee salaries.
- e. He stated the city is fortunate to have scores of well qualified employees. The vast majority of which come to work every day with a smile on their face and a work ethic in their soul. Today in business and in Government, retention of quality employees is essential. The city is also very fortunate that our sales tax revenue has increased. He stated a few weeks ago he met with the Council Finance Sub-Committee including Councilman Rolling, Councilman Smith and Councilman Roberts. We reviewed the increase in revenue over the past couple of years. In 2021, we enjoyed a 16% increase in sales tax collection. Thus far this year, we are experiencing an additional 15% increase on top of that 16%. In raw numbers, that is an increase of \$2.3 million last year and another \$500,000 in the first quarter of this year. These are significant numbers and with that said we all agreed we need to be careful here. He stated that just as our revenue is up so our cost. Just look back at this evening's budget amendment. From the Councilman questions our finance director Nina Sweeney was able to provide us with hard numbers as to what an increase in salaries and benefits would cost for our employees. Specifically, what can we comfortably implement and sustain with our projected recurring income. Those numbers on increase of salary of 4% including benefits would cost the city approximately \$400,000 per year, 5% about 500,00, 6% approximately 600,000. I recognize that such an increase would not fully cover the approximate 8% inflation based evaluation of employee salaries but, it certainly would be a step in the right direction. These costs taken in context relative to our increased

revenue of \$2.8 million in the past 15 months allow us to be comfortable in implementing a 5% or a 6% pay increase. He stated at this time, he is asking the Council to place on next month's agenda an across the board pay raises for all employees. He stated he is asking that increase be in the 5% to 6% range. Again, I realize that the valuation of their salaries is greater than that and again this council and this administration have always been fiscally conservative. He stated that we have the increased revenue to cover this and he thinks it's the right thing to do.

Councilman Lewis just wanted to clarify the Mayor's last statement of raises across the board for everyone.

Mayor Johnson stated that is correct.

Councilman Lewis asked who received the last raise that was given?

Mayor Johnson replied the last raise the Council gave was to all employees except the Mayor. Mayor Johnson stated he has not taken a increase in salary since he was elected.

Council President Rolling stated the Council will review and get back with Administration.

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

- **Council President Rolling reminded everyone of the August 09, 2022 City of Covington Council Meeting which will be held on Tuesday, August 09, 2022 at 6pm in the Council Chambers.**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:01 PM.

Video of this meeting can be found on www.covla.com.

/s/ _____
LARRY ROLLING
Council President

/s/ _____
JOANN RUCKER
Council Clerk