



**TOWN OF PEARL RIVER
SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING
August 12, 2020 at 4:30 P.M.**

CALL TO ORDER:

The Special Council Meeting was held at the Pearl River Town Hall and called to order by Mayor McQueen at 4:30 p.m.

INVOCATION:

The Invocation was given by Alderman Bennett.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mayor McQueen.

ROLL CALL:

Present: Alderman Galloway, Walsh, McGregor, Lee, Bennett, Chief Sessions along with Mayor McQueen, and Attorney Mathison.

SALES TAX: Mayor McQueen notified the Council that the Sales Tax collected in the month of July exceeded all expectations on August 7th the Town received \$168,483.71.

DISCUSSION ITEM: Ordinance 19-11-19 (A) - FY 2020 Budget

Mayor McQueen opened for discussion the 2020 Budget to the Council. He explained to the Council that he was presenting them with two budgets; #1 is the one he presented to the Council and #2 is the budget with all the new changes. Mayor McQueen stated one of the changes that were made was that a Claim Bucket was added to General Budget and that in the Street Budget he moved money from the Part-Time Summer Bucket to Salaries Bucket because the figures were running close.

Alderman McGregor asked about increasing the Town Clerk's salary back to the original amount. Mayor McQueen stated the Clerk's salary and raises for all other employees in his department would be addressed in the 2021 Budget this October. The Mayor told the Council that concluded his part and asked Chief Sessions to address the Police Department portion of the Budget.

Chief Sessions stated he had been sick with COVID but all he saw was where the salaries were cut by \$30,000.00 and since it was already done he had nothing furthered to add.

Alderman Lee asked Chief Sessions which budget he was looking at, #1 or #2.

Chief Sessions reiterated he just saw where the salaries were cut \$30,000.00.

Mayor McQueen stated to Chief Sessions that he and the Council were on the #2 Budget.

Alderman Lee explained to Chief Sessions that he and a couple of the Aldermen felt they should take some money and put it in the Claims Bucket for future litigation.

Chief Session asked Alderman Lee if he was referring to the current lawsuit against the Police

Department and if so, did he read it.

Alderman Lee replied yes he did.

Alderman Bennet asked if there was more than one lawsuit and if the Town's Insurance Company's Legal Department was aware of it.

Attorney Mathison stated, no there is only one lawsuit and yes they were contacted and will provide a defense for the Town. He also notified the Council that the Insurance Company sent a Reservation of Rights letter stating that if punitive damages were awarded the Town would not be covered.

Alderman Bennett stated she was appalled by the lawsuit and felt it was racism from the other side.

Alderman Galloway stated to Attorney Mathison her concern was she knew that Chief Sessions could be Chief without being a police officer, but she was getting feedback that Chief Sessions pulled a gun acting as an officer.

Chief Sessions replied he never pulled a gun and was not driving a black pickup truck. Chief Sessions then asked Attorney Mathison if he could talk about it.

Attorney Mathison cautioned Chief Sessions stating it was early in the litigation to speculate on the lawsuit.

Alderman Bennett stated that Chief Sessions did not have to be Post Certified and had the right as an elected official to perform the duties of an officer according to Attorney Daigle.

Chief Sessions then stated not according to Attorney Mathison.

Attorney Mathison told Chief Sessions he stated that it might be an issue in the lawsuit not being Post Certified.

Chief Sessions proceeded to tell the Council he has heard hearsay that he is presumed guilty. Chief Sessions stated he was concerned when he saw the individual that is pending in the lawsuit that morning.

Alderman Lee stated he would rather play it safe and have some money put up to prepare for the worst. He told Chief Sessions that because of the previous Chief the Town has had to write checks to pay other lawsuits and he felt for the future the Town should be prepared.

Chief Sessions stated, "There glitches in the lawsuit."

Alderman Galloway asked Chief Sessions about the case with his family member that was arrested then let go.

Chief Sessions stated the case was still open.

Deputy Chief Hunter stated that the incident did happen and the information about the case on Terry King's Facebook page came from a disgruntled employee that no longer worked for the Police Department. The family member that was arrested was transported to the hospital due to complaints at which time he was admitted to the hospital, an arrest warrant was issued and sent to the Judge from there it was placed in NCIC.

Chief Sessions stated that Officer Gaudet was working on this case before he passed.

Chief Session stated he has never placed anyone in handcuffs and always called Officer Gaudet or Deputy Chief Hunter and asked what their 20 was when he sees someone suspicious.

Alderman Galloway asked Chief Sessions if he ever put a gun to someone's head.

Chief Sessions stated he took his gun out when Officer Gaudet said he had a gun. He stated, "Shoot me".

Chief Sessions said he held the gun on the individual until Officer Gaudet placed him in handcuffs after which time Chief Sessions returned to his unit.

Alderman Bennett stated she felt everything being said about the Police Department were rumors that were being stated on "Concerned Citizens of St Tammany Parish" Facebook Page.

Chief Sessions asked the Council if he ever disrespected anyone on the Council to raise their hand.

Town Clerk Cheryl Schultheis raised her hand and stated she felt she was disrespected several times on Payroll.

Alderman Lee stated he too felt disrespected in the December Council Meeting.

Chief Sessions stated to Mayor McQueen to roll the cameras back.

Alderman Walsh stated the Council will have heated moments and that when she heard the allegations against the Police Department she reached out to them but did not get a response. Alderman Walsh then stated the Council needed to get back to the 2020 Budget and told Chief Sessions to refer to the #2 budget. She then told Chief Sessions in regards to the money that was being set aside for claims the Council did not know what would come out of it. Alderman Walsh stated she felt it would be like a little savings and if it was not used it could go back into the Police Department budget the following year. Alderman McGregor stated to Chief Sessions he too was in favor of the Claims bucket to cover any litigation expenses if needed.

Alderman Lee proceeded to explain to Chief Sessions the changes made on the #2 budget.

Mayor McQueen stated the Police General & Auto Liability/Full Coverage Insurance bucket had to be increased by \$2,200.00 due to the monies being short for the final bill.

Alderman Lee stated all these changes are suggestions for the Police Department to take into account.

Alderman Bennett asked the Council if they felt that there was any overspending by the Police Department.

Mayor McQueen stated no.

Alderman Lee stated once the Police Department vehicles were surplus that money would go back to the Police Department.

Alderman Bennett asked how the vehicles were going to be surplus.

Mayor McQueen stated it was up to the Council and they could address it at the next Council meeting.

Chief Sessions stated he felt the Town would do better if the vehicles were sent to auction.

Attorney Mathison agreed it would be better because the auction would handle all the title transfers for all the vehicles.

Alderman Walsh asked if the surplus monies would go back into the departments they came from.

Attorney Mathison stated it would be up to the Council where the monies would go.

Deputy Chief Hunter asked if any of the Council reviewed the 2019 actuals before cutting the budget.

Alderman Walsh and Alderman Lee stated that they did.

Deputy Chief Hunter stated the Gas & Oil bucket was being knocked down to \$30,000.00 and Payroll/Salaries was being knocked down to \$500,000.00 on the #2 budget.

Alderman Walsh asked Deputy Chief Hunter if he thought that was too tight.

Alderman Lee stated he was not in agreement with the previous Police Chief in regards to take home cars for officers outside the Town limits. He also stated he currently had a problem with dispatchers taking home a car because of the unnecessary gas usage.

Deputy Chief Hunter felt that because they were on call the part-time officer and Supervisor for Dispatch should have a take home car.

Chief Sessions said he felt he has saved the Police Department monies with his remodeling of his office.

Alderman Walsh stated that it did not matter.

Mayor McQueen stated to Chief Sessions that it was the Chief's responsibility to look at the budget and to tell the Council what he needed to run his department. Mayor McQueen stated he worked with the taxpayers monies and was not going to waste it. Mayor McQueen stated the Police Department has gotten too big with the previous Chief and he was trying to get it back in line.

Chief Session stated he felt the Town Clerk Cheryl wanted the Police Department to go back to when Chief Raynor was in office.

Mayor McQueen stated whether Chief Sessions took that office or anybody else he feels that the entire department has gotten way out of hand. Mayor McQueen stated he could not keep letting the citizens pay for it.

Chief Sessions stated this is where the problem is going to come in; he will put one officer on in the day and one at night. He stated when we get a call from dispatch and cannot handle it, do not call me.

Alderman Bennett stated she agreed with Alderman Lee in reference to the take home cars, when the previous chief was there the whole Police Department was on call. She felt only the top of the chain should have take home vehicles.

Alderman Lee stated he felt if the officers lived in Town they should have a take home car.

Alderman Walsh stated the Police Department needed to communicate with the Council. She felt it was good to have the local officers take home a car and maybe the Ordinance restricting the distance for a take home car should be addressed. She then explained to Deputy Chief Hunter that the actuals in the Salaries Bucket of the 2019 Budget might not reflect the 2020 Budget. She informed him that she looked at what was spent in the past seven months versus what might be needed in the remaining months of 2020 for Salaries. Alderman Walsh stated to Chief Sessions that she wanted to work with the Police Department, but that she needed the Chief to bring her the information to support his 2020 Budget. Deputy Chief Hunter stated the Police Department did have the same amount of Officers as 2019 until two months ago. He told the Council the Department was down four Officers now.

He stated the Police Department was down one Police Officer for Little Pearl because the St. Tammany Parish School Board was pushing for a School Resource Officer there, but we are keeping it as a Detailed because it is more cost effective for the Department. He stated at this time when school starts the Department will be short an Officer on nights and a School Resource Officer that is leaving. He told the Council he had three floaters: a Detective, a part time Traffic Officer, and himself that are not assigned to specific shifts.

Alderman Walsh asked who the Detective is.

Deputy Chief Hunter replied Officer Jason German stepped up to fill Officer Gaudet's position.

Alderman Bennett asked Deputy Chief Hunter if they were hiring.

Deputy Chief Hunter stated that they are.

Alderman Walsh asked Deputy Chief Hunter if they hired one that was going to the Academy.

Deputy Chief Hunter stated that they did have a Reserve Officer going to the Academy now that wants to go full time once he graduates in November from the Academy.

Alderman Walsh asked if the Police Department had the paperwork that says upon coming here and the Town paying for you to become Post Certified they would work for the Town Police Department upon graduation for a year or two.

Deputy Chief Hunter stated he did not think the Police Department had that paperwork. He stated the Town used to but at this time the Town does not pay for the Academy for an Officer to get Post Certified for Pearl River because he volunteers as a teacher there.

Alderman Walsh stated okay if you are there as a volunteer the Town does not pay and if you do not volunteer then the Town pays.

Deputy Chief Hunter stated that is correct, he is assigned at the Academy from here.

Alderman Walsh asked if the Police Department would get with the Attorneys and come up with paperwork that states if the Town pays for them to go to the Academy upon graduation they would work for the Town.

Deputy Chief Hunter stated he would not use the word volunteer; he is assigned to the Academy while he is on the clock for the Town in exchange for the Academy not to charge the Town for Post Certification.

Alderman Lee stated he felt by Deputy Chief Hunter being at the Academy that the Town was losing manpower.

Deputy Chief Hunter stated he is not assigned to a specific shift.

Alderman Walsh stated instead of an officer being on a day or night shift by themselves, could Deputy Chief Hunter not do the training and fills the shift, that way there are two officers on duty.

Deputy Chief Hunter stated either way training has to be done, so it is either the Town gets free training by him going to the Academy teaching five to six classes for a four month period or he stays at the Police

Department doing administrative duties.

Alderman Walsh told Deputy Chief Hunter she felt it would be better if he was here at the Police Department on salary as an Officer then to be at the Academy training. She then asked him what the cost for an officer to go to the Academy.

Deputy Chief Hunter stated it was anywhere from \$800.00 to \$900.00 dollars but he was not sure. He stated that Reserves would be going to the training also, so the pros outweighed the cons.

Alderman Walsh stated she hoped the Police Department did their homework on this to ensure the Town was saving money. She also stated to Chief Sessions she did not like the idea of one officer on day or night by themselves.

Mayor McQueen stated the Police Department has been doing that.

Chief Sessions stated," How are you going to pay them? It's getting cut even more; are you looking at the budget?"

Alderman Lee told Chief Sessions that when you did not hire a School Resource Officer for Little Pearl you lost close to \$50,000.00. He then told Chief Sessions once the vehicles were surplus those monies would go back the Salary Bucket and if they were short to come back before the Council and they would adjust it.

Alderman McGregor stated if the Police Department hired a School Resource Officer for Little Pearl you would get the salary back. He then asked Deputy Chief Hunter what an officer needed to qualify as a School Resource Officer.

Deputy Chief Hunter stated they had to be Post Certified.

Mayor McQueen asked if Chief Sessions had any other questions on the Police Budget.

Chief Sessions stated," No, we are good."

Mayor McQueen then asked the Council if they had anything to add to the Budget.

Mayor McQueen then adjourned the meeting.

CD available in Records room, per-request.

MEETING ADJOURNED

AT 6:00 P.M.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED THIS 12TH DAY OF AUGUST 2020


Cheryl K. Schultheis


Honorable Clarence "David" McQueen