



**TOWN OF PEARL RIVER
COUNCIL MEETING
August 18, 2020 at 7:00 P.M.**

CALL TO ORDER:

The Council Meeting was held at the Pearl River Town Hall and called to order by Mayor McQueen at 7:00 p.m.

INVOCATION:

The Invocation was given by Alderman Galloway.

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, Attorney Mathison and Attorney Daigle. Absent: None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mayor McQueen called for the approval of the minutes for July 8, 2020 Special Council Meeting. Alderman Bennett made the motion to accept, seconded by Alderman McGregor. **All in favor.**
So moved.

Mayor McQueen called for the approval of the minutes for July 28, 2020 Council Meeting. Alderman Bennett made the motion to accept, seconded by Alderman Lee. **All in favor.**
So moved.

ORDINANCE INTRODUCTION:

Mayor McQueen introduced Ordinance 08-18-20 (A) – An ordinance relative to time keeping by town employees.

Mayor McQueen introduced Ordinance 08-18-20 (B) – An ordinance relative to reimbursement for employee training expenses.

Mayor McQueen introduced Ordinance 08-18-20 (C) – An ordinance relative to inventory of Town property. There will be a public hearing on all of the Ordinances on September 15, 2020.

PUBLIC HEARING:

Ordinance 07-28-20(A) - An ordinance annexing and zoning a parcel of land along West Porter River Road for the Moray family.

Mayor McQueen opened the Public Hearing on Ordinance 07-28-20 (A) - An ordinance annexing and zoning a parcel of land along West Porter River Road for the Moray family.

Mayor McQueen stated the Public Hearing on this ordinance will have to be postpone until the September 15, 2020 Council Meeting due to the Planning & Zoning not being able to hold their Public

Hearing until September 1, 2020. Mayor McQueen asked the Council to make a motion. Alderman Walsh made a motion to table it to the Council Meeting on September 15, 2020, seconded by Alderman Galloway. **All in favor. So moved.**

Ordinance 07-28-20 (B)-An ordinance declaring certain property of the Town of Pearl River surplus and setting the method of disposing same;

Mayor McQueen opened the Public Hearing on Ordinance 07-28-20 (B)-An ordinance declaring certain property of the Town of Pearl River surplus and setting the method of disposing same;

Mayor McQueen told the Council they received the list of all the items to be surplus from the Police Department, Street Department and Sewer Department. Mayor McQueen closed the Public Hearing and asked the Council if they wanted to send the surplus items to an auction.

Alderman Bennett and Alderman Galloway agreed it would be easier without favoritism.

Alderman Bennett made a motion, seconded by Alderman Galloway. **All in favor. So moved.**

Ordinance 07-28-20 (C)-An ordinance relative to lawsuit procedure.

Mayor McQueen opened the Public Hearing on Ordinance 07-28-20 (C)-An ordinance relative to lawsuit procedure.

Alderman Lee stated the ordinance looked good but he was concerned with line #4 that stated once the lawsuit was filed that an elected official could not comment on it. He told the Council he did not agree with it and felt the citizens of the Town had the right to know and he should be able to talk to them.

Alderman Galloway stated she spoke to Attorney Daigle in reference to it and he told her it was to protect the defense strategy of the Town. She suggested that Attorney Mathison could add some verbiage in reference to preserving the defense strategy.

Alderman Bennett stated in the past case by case it was indicated what can be talked about through e-mails and Executive Session. She stated she agreed with Alderman Lee the public has a right to know and the ordinance needed a little more to distinguish what could be talked about.

Mayor McQueen stated in Executive Session the Insurance Attorney always impressed on the Council that nothing was to be said in reference to the case once leaving Executive Session.

Alderman Lee said, "We do not answer to the Insurance people, we answer to the Town." He then told the Council he just wants to be able to discuss what is common knowledge with the public. Alderman Lee then asked Attorney Mathison if he had a suggestion or sentence that he could add to the ordinance.

Attorney Mathison stated he knew what the Council wanted to accomplish and he would suggest for the Council to table this ordinance until he works up a new draft.

Alderman Walsh made a motion to table it to the Council Meeting on September 15, 2020, seconded by Alderman Bennett. **All in favor. So moved.**

Chief Sessions then stated he would like to have the Council and the two Town Attorneys present for the meeting on Thursday, August 20th with the Insurance Company Attorney.

Attorney Mathison advised Chief Sessions there were legal reasons why it was not in his best interest.

TABLED ITEMS:

Ordinance 19-11-19A- An ordinance amending this Fiscal Year 2020 Budget.

Mayor McQueen asked the Council to move the Tabled Item to the floor, Ordinance 19-11-19A amending the Fiscal Year 2020 Budget.

Alderman Walsh made a motion to move the tabled item to the floor, seconded by Alderman Bennett. **All in favor. So moved.**

Mayor McQueen opened the Public Hearing on Ordinance 19-11-19A amending the Fiscal Year 2020 Budget.

Alderman Bennett explained the Budget and cuts made to the Police Department Budget. Alderman Bennett proceeded to tell the Council she wanted to make a few points on record in reference to the

Police Department Budget. She stated that the current Police Department Budget is \$100,000.00 less than the previous Police Chief Budget, so she feels their budget has already been cut. She stated to her knowledge the Police Department has lived within their means of that budget. She stated that she asked the Council in the previous Council Meeting if she was missing something in every one of the line items because she did not see it. She told the Council that not one of them said there was an issue or concern with overspending. She stated it was her understanding that this budget cut request was because of litigation concerns. She told the Council she asked Attorney Mathison how many lawsuits were against the Town and he said one.

She stated she found the lawsuit to be appalling and if the Police Department is guilty she wants them to be held accountable. Alderman Bennett stated she felt the Council was making decisions on litigation and hearsay. She stated at this time in our country we should not be defunding the Police Department Budget.

Mayor McQueen stated that the previous Police Chief built a big budget by writing tickets and he explained to Chief Sessions that today the revenue is not there. Mayor McQueen stated he answered to all the taxpayers not just the Police Department. Mayor McQueen told the Council that nobody here has fought any harder for the Police Department but when it came to the Budget it was his responsibility to make the cuts in all departments. He stated the General Department has been cut to the bone the past two years and he has not complained once. Mayor McQueen stated that he hates that the cuts have to happen but if the Police Department sells their surplus the Police Department is not being cut that much.

Alderman Lee stated he was not here during the last administration but he did see the amount the Town had to pay in the lawsuit with Casey Adams. He told the Council the previous Police Department screwed up and the Town Insurance did not cover the lawsuit making the Town pay for it out of the Money Market. He stated we are taking less than \$100,000.00 from the Police Department Budget and not spending somewhere else but placing it in a line item to save it just in case the Town needs it. He stated he felt if the Council did not do this they would be neglectful.

Alderman Galloway stated the lawsuit is \$500,000.00 and that's why the Council feels they need to put the money in the line item.

Alderman Lee stated he felt the Council needed to be cautious and that none of them were looking to defund the Police Department. Alderman Lee stated that, "He errs on the side of caution."

Attorney Daigle went over the Police Budget with the Council. He stated \$30,000.00 was cut from Miscellaneous Income Bucket until the monies from the surplus are realized. He explained at the beginning of the year a School Resource Officer was to be hired for Little Pearl, which did not happen costing the Police Department \$47,000.00 from the St. Tammany School Board out of the School Board Resource Officer Bucket. He stated in Transfers In from General were reduced from \$223,500.00 to \$132,375.00 to move money into a Claims Bucket in the General Fund due to the lawsuit pending. He then went over with the Council several reductions in Expenditures.

Attorney Daigle stated they have been working on this Budget for months and have reached out several times in reference to the Police Department Budget.

Chief Sessions stated that, "Attorney Daigle is saying he did not get much feedback from me." He stated, "I lay in my bed for 30 days with the COVID and all anyone had to do was to call my phone."

Attorney Daigle stated Chief Sessions had the Police Department Budget for 60 days and needed to respond to the Council if he had changes he wanted to make to it.

Mayor McQueen stated the way the Budget works is he presents it to the Police Department and if there are any changes that need to be made the Chief is supposed to contact him or come to his office and let him know so he can make the adjustments. He then stated, "Chief Sessions you never did, never have, never tried so do not use that tone on me because I am in my office every day of the week and I never received a call." He stated the Chief is supposed to go over his own budget, when he did not hear a response from the Chief the Council decided at the Special Council Meeting that they were going to change the Budget. Mayor McQueen then stated that the Council could change his budget and the

Police Department Budget that was the Council's purpose of sitting here to control the spending of the Mayor and Police Chief.

Alderman Bennett stated the big changes came last week; they were different from just the \$30,000.00 change. She stated that some of the members of the Council decided to cut the Police Budget even more because of the lawsuit.

Attorney Daigle agreed with Alderman Bennett stating that did happen we held a Public Meeting/Public Workshop last week and no one from the Police Department after that meeting said look we want our budget to look like this. He stated up until right now no one has reached out from the Police Department.

Deputy Chief Hunter stated he received two budgets last week and that the Police Department was okay with the one with the \$30,000.00 cut.

Attorney Daigle told Deputy Chief Hunter all he was saying is after that meeting they should have put together their proposal and walked it over to the Mayor.

Alderman Walsh stated she reached out to Deputy Chief Hunter and was trying to share information from the previous meeting. She then told Chief Sessions she expected the Chief of Police to be active in the budget. Alderman Walsh told Chief Sessions we are not cutting or defunding the Police Department Budget. The Council will look at the 2020 Budget again before the year is up and move money around where the department needs it.

Mayor McQueen closed the Public Hearing and asked the Council to make a motion. Alderman Lee made a motion to accept Ordinance 19-11-19A 2020 Fiscal Budget, seconded by Alderman McGregor. Alderman Walsh asked the Council for a Roll Call Vote:

Alderman Galloway- Yea

Alderman Walsh- Yea

Alderman McGregor- Yea

Alderman Lee- Yea

Alderman Bennett-Nay

Mayor McQueen stated so moved.

Chief Sessions stated he wanted to read something to the Council. He told the Council that at the end of the day they are in full control over what they give the Police Department. He stated he has lived within the Budget the Council has approved and not spent one cent unnecessarily or wasteful. He told the Council he would make it work with what they gave him to the best of his ability and to protect the people of this community, but be aware once the complaints start coming in about only one officer on duty at a time with no backup. He stated he is going to refer each one of them to the Council to answer their question.

Mayor McQueen stated that Chief Sessions was threatening the people of the Town. He told Chief Sessions you are putting one officer out there at night and have been doing it for a while.

LEGISLATIVE COMMENTS AND REPORTS:

- **Alderman Bennett- Honey Island Swamp Festival**

Alderman Bennett notified the Council that the Honey Island Swamp Festival was cancelled due to the COVID. She then told the Council to her knowledge the Pearl River Clean-Up will still be on for September 26, 2020.

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMENTS AND REPORTS

- **Police Chief- None**

- **Mayor**
Mayor McQueen told the Council he wanted to update the Council on the Hwy 41 Spur Bridge. He informed the Council that pylons were coming in on Thursday so they could start driving them in for the new bridge.

RECREATION DISTRICT #5

None

FIRE DISTRICT #11

Chief Dockery-July

EMS-67

MVA-4

Structure Fire-1MA

Vehicle Fire-1

Service/GI-6

Dispatched/Canceled-14

Rubbish/Grass Fire-3

False Alarm-7

Police Matter-2

102- Total

PARISH COUNCIL:

None

SCHOOL BOARD:

None

PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION:

None

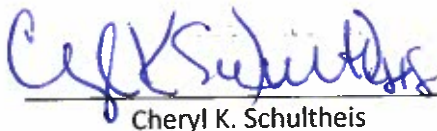
Mayor McQueen adjourned the meeting.

CD available in Records room, per-request.

MEETING ADJOURNED

AT 8:12 P.M.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED THIS 18TH DAY OF AUGUST 2020


Cheryl K. Schultheis


Honorable Clarence "David" McQueen