

**MINUTES OF
THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF COLUMBUS, MS**

**AUGUST 2, 2022
5:00 P.M.**

The Mayor and City Council met in Regular Session on Tuesday, August 2, 2022 at 5:00 p.m. in the Court Chambers of the Municipal Complex. Mayor Keith Gaskin presided over the meeting, and all Council Members were present. Also present were the General Counsel, the COO, CFO, Police Chief, Assistant Police Chief, HR Director, and all other Department Heads.

I. CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION

Mayor Gaskin called the meeting to order and called upon Rev. Willie Jones, Pastor of Anderson Grove M. B. Church, to offer the Invocation.

II. CONFIRMATION OF/OR AMENDMENTS TO THE AGENDA

Council Member Greene made a motion to adopt the Agenda as presented. Council Member Jones seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

III. APPROVE MINUTES FOR PREVIOUS MEETING

A. Approve Minutes from Meeting of July 19, 2022

Council Member Diccio made a motion to approve the Minutes for the Meeting of July 19, 2022. Council Member Jones seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approve request for Fire and Rescue personnel, Marco Rodriguez, to attend "Fire Service Management 101 Company Officer" to be held in Jackson, MS on

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August 15 – 18, 2022 and approve payment of \$415.00 for registration, \$70.00 for travel and reimbursement for meal expenses.

- B. Approve request for Fire and Rescue personnel, Murphy Buckner, to attend “NFPA 1041 I-II (on-line) Fire Service Instructor” course to be held in Jackson, MS, on August 15, 2022 and approve payment of \$600.00 for registration, \$50.00 for travel, and reimbursement for meal expenses
- C. Approve request for Fire and Rescue personnel, Joseph Denton, to attend “Rope Rescue Technician Fire Service Instructor” to be held in Jackson, MS, August 22 – 25, 2022 and approve payment of \$365.00 for registration, \$50.00 for travel and reimbursement of meal expenses.
- D. Approve request for Fire and Rescue personnel, Dorothea Tompkins, to attend “Emergency Service Administrative Professionals (ESAP)” to be held in Biloxi, MS, on September 7 – 9, 2022, and approve payment of \$150.00 for registration, \$239.97 for lodging, travel in a city vehicle, \$50.00 for membership fee and reimbursement of meal expenses.
- E. Accept letter of resignation from Fire and Rescue Engineer, Brent Younger, effective July 29, 2022 and approve payment of any unused vacation leave.
- F. Approve request to apply for one (1) Notary Commission for Registrar, Yolanda Smith, in the estimated amount of \$210.94.
- G. Ratify permit request submitted by Demetrus Pratt to host a “Candlelight Memorial” that was held on July 30, 2022 from 5:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m., blocking 16th Street North from 7th Avenue North to 8th Avenue North.
- H. Approve request to send CPD Officers, Ke’Shawn Adams and Austin Green to the “Mississippi Delta Community College Law Enforcement Training Academy” in Moorhead, MS and approve cost of tuition (\$7,200.00) that will be reimbursed and clothing required by the academy. The clothing allowance is not to exceed \$350.00 per officer and will be reimbursed upon completion of the academy.
- I. Accept letter of resignation from CPD Officer, Zachary O’Callaghan, effective August 10, 2022.
- J. Approve permit request submitted by Logan Waggoner, on behalf of Annunciation Catholic School, to host the “IN Our Nation Day Parade” to be held on January 31, 2023 from 9:30 a.m. until 10:00 a.m. at Annunciation Catholic School, 223 North Browder Street, turning right onto Browder Street, right onto Alabama Street, right onto Gardner Blvd., right onto Maxwell and right onto ACS’s parking lot.

- K. Approve request to apply for a notary commission for Valancia Bush and renew notary commission for Elizabeth Cheatham and approve payment for necessary notary supplies in the estimated amount of \$400.00.

Council Member Jones made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Council Member Diccico seconded the motion. The Mayor called for discussion, and there being none, all Council Members voted in favor of same, with a unanimous vote.

V. APPROVE DOCKET OF CLAIMS

Council Member Stewart made a motion to approve the Docket of Claims for August 2, 2022, in the amount of \$354,836.54. Council Member Jones seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

VI. REPORTS, PROCLAMATIONS, RECOGNITIONS AGENDA

A. Mayor Gaskin asked if any Council Members had any comments/announcements.

There were no comments from Member of the Council.

Mayor Gaskin made the following announcements/observations:

- Mayor Gaskin invited Ms. Nora Miller, President of MUW, and the school's mascot, Ody Owl, to come forward and thanked them for coming.
- Next, Mayor Gaskin read a proclamation honoring Rev. Joe Lee Peoples, who has been the Pastor of Stephen Chapel M. B. Church for 50 years. What a major accomplishment!

WHEREAS, Rev. Joe Lee Peoples was born in Pickens County, AL and moved to Lowndes County, MS at an early age. He attended the Columbus Public schools and graduated from R.E. Hunt High School in 1961 and later earned a Bachelor of Theology degree from Ministerial Institute and College in West Point, MS; and he met and married the former Annie Pearl Harris, and they are parents to six lovely children. In July 1972, Rev. Joe Lee Peoples was elected Pastor of Stephen Chapel Missionary Baptist Church; and

WHEREAS, during Pastor Peoples' many years of service, he has brought many to Christ. Under his administration, Stephen Chapel has accomplished

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many goals. The church's cornerstone was laid on December 8, 1974. The Sunday School has grown and now has over 150 members. Wednesday Bible Study continues to be well attended at the morning class and the evening class with approximately 80 members weekly, and

WHEREAS, he has led Stephen Chapel in building an addition to the church, the construction of a Family Life Center, and the purchase of eleven lots for future construction of a new sanctuary. The Food Pantry/Mississippi Food Network partnership was inspired under his guidance to aid those in need in the community. We thank God for sending us Pastor Joe Lee Peoples!

- We would like to remind our citizens about National Night Out on Crime locations this evening from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Join the Columbus Police Department at the following locations:

Sim Scott Park, 800 Block of 20th Street North
Townsend Community Center, 900 Block of 15th Street South
East Columbus Gym, Lawrence Street
Sandfield Community Center

National Night Out (NNO) is designed to increase crime and drug prevention awareness, strengthen neighborhood spirit and police community partnerships.

- We thank the members who participated in the meetings concerning the Kerr McGee Multi-trust that were held last week.
- Thank the businesses and citizens who took part in the Downtown "Let's Flamingle Scavenger Hunt on Friday, July 29.
- The 2022-2023 school year is upon us. Many area schools are returning this week. I know Columbus Municipal School District will begin school on Friday, August 5. The district held parent meetings last week, so we thank the parents who came out to those meetings. We appreciate all the churches, agencies, non-profits, community groups, etc. who have and are continuing to hold school supply drives. Thank the Columbus-Lowndes Chamber of Commerce, its Education Committee and Community Sponsors for the "Educators are Essential" initiative and programs taking place this week. Let's keep our bus drivers, cafeteria workers, school administrators, principals, teachers, support staff in our prayers for a safe and successful school year.
- The United Way's Live United Drive Results event will take place on Thursday, August 25, from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the Hitching Lot at the Farmer's Market. There will be food trucks, live music. Everyone is encouraged to attend.

- The Contact Helpline's 5K Race and Memory Walk will be on Saturday, September 10 at 10:00 a.m. at the Columbus Soccer Complex, beginning at 8:00 a.m.

B. Columbus Fire and Rescue wishes to recognize three (3) citizens that have gone above and beyond in supporting Columbus Fire and Rescue in our community service efforts.

Chief Hughes came forward and recognized Heroes in the community and presented a plaque to each of them for their service and continued by thanking Mrs. Renee Sanders and United Way for a \$5,000.00 Grant that was used to purchase Smoke Alarms.

Ms. Cleopatra Pearson, Regional Manager of McDonalds, was recognized for services rendered to the Columbus Fire and Rescue Department in ensuring that Firefighters have plenty of water and necessities when extinguishing a fire.

Mr. Duane Fulton was recognized for securing over 150 cases of water and Gatorade for the Fire and Rescue Department.

We are grateful for the service of these citizens.

C. Parks & Recreation wishes to recognize its Dizzy Dean World Series participants

Greg Lewis, Director of Columbus Recreation Department, came forth and recognized coaches and participants in the Dizzy Dean World Series:

Coach Billy Wayne White and team members 7 and 8 year old boys.

Coach Henderson and team members 9 – 10 year old boys.

Coach Thomas and team members 7 – 8 year girls.

The Coach of 5 – 6 year old boys T-Ball Team Members.

Mr. Lewis thanked the coaches, parents and all the children that participated in this year's Dizzy Dean World Series. The players enjoyed all of the events and some of them are still playing. Congratulations for a job well done!

Vice-Mayor Mickens recognized Dr. Cherie Labat, Superintendent of CMSD, for securing \$20 million dollars of FEMA funds to improve Hunt school.

D. Swearing in of one (1) CPD Officer

Mayor Gaskin swore in new Police Officer, Austin Green, as he recited the Oath of Office. Chief Shelton and Assistant Chief Johnson came forward and pinned on the badge and insignia.

E. Board vacancies

Ms. Jammie Garrett, COO, announced vacancies on various boards and remarked that no appointments will be made tonight.

CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

1 Vacancy, 4-Year Term, Rita Felton's Term Expires August 15, 2022.
Appointment will be made August 16, 2022.

APPLICANT:

- Rita Felton

REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY BOARD

1 Vacancy, 4-Year Term, Mark G. Alexander Sr.'s Term Expires 9/05/2022.
Appointment will be made September 6, 2022.

APPLICANT:

- Joseph Bragg

F. Financial/Audit Update

Mr. Jim Brigham, CFO, updated the Mayor and Council on the 2020 Audit and the City's finances. He began by stating that he is closing out the month of July and preparing a monthly report and has crossed the last hurdle to complete the 2020 audit, reviewed FEMA documents and the Blight Elimination Program. We are now beginning on the 2021 audit. Mr. Brigham reported that he received a surprise visit from the IRS to settle some outstanding claims and resolved all issues and were able to abate approximately \$16,000.00. The City did have a fine of \$39,000.00 for failure to file the 2017 W2s and 1099s in a timely manner. Part-time employees were paid incentive pay. I'm working on the budget for 2023 and will schedule meetings with the Council. I met with Greg Andrews, Lowndes County Tax Assessor/Collector and have the proposed millage and will begin advertising. We receive notice this week of a debt service payment and wired the funds. This is a once-a-year payment that resulted from the refunding of the 2014 G.O. bonds, which occurred in late 2021, but was not added in the computer. I will prepare a debt schedule to prevent this from occurring in the future.

VII. CITIZENS INPUT AGENDA

A. Ms. Helen Pridmore, Downtown Trash Concerns

Joe Dillon, PIO, came forward and remarked that Scott and Helen Pridmore would like to meet with the Mayor and discuss proposal and ideas and come back before the Council at a later date.

VIII. POLICY AGENDA

A. Discuss/Approve Derelict Property Docket

HILBERT WILLIAMS

1809 3rd Avenue South

CASE NUMBER: 22-0139 ABANDONED STRUCTURE/BUILDING

The General Counsel called cause number **22-0139**. No one appeared in person. Code Enforcement Officer Sasha James stated the property was in such a state of uncleanness as to be a menace to the public under Section 21-19-11 of the Mississippi Code and asked the Mayor and Council to adjudicate the property as such and that an Order be entered to such effect, requested **immediate abatement** and that an Order be issued for the property. Council Member Greene made a motion in accordance with Section 21-19-11 of the Mississippi Code, and for an Order stating the City may remove dilapidated buildings or dilapidated fences up to six (6) more times in the twelve (12) month period immediately following the Order and cutting grass and weeds and removing rubbish, personal property and other debris no more than twelve (12) times in a twenty-four (24) month period. Council Member Stewart seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

BELVIN DUCK

1903 Bell Avenue

**CASE NUMBER: 22-0179 OVERGROWN LOT AND ACCUMULATION OF
RUBBISH AND GARBAGE**

The General Counsel called cause number **22-0179**. No one appeared in person. Code Enforcement Officer Sasha James stated the property was in such a state of uncleanness as to be a menace to the public under Section 21-19-11 of the Mississippi Code and asked the Mayor and Council to adjudicate the property as such and that an Order be entered to such effect, requested **immediate abatement** and that an Order be issued for the property. Council Member Greene made a motion in accordance with Section 21-19-11 of the Mississippi Code, and for an Order stating the City may remove dilapidated buildings or dilapidated fences up to six (6) more times in the twelve (12) month period immediately following the Order and cutting grass and weeds and removing rubbish, personal

property and other debris no more than twelve (12) times in a twenty-four (24) month period. Council Member Stewart seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

KATRINA L. WATKINS

319 Florence Street

CASE NUMBER: 22-0193

OVERGROWN LOT

The General Counsel called cause number **22-0193**. No one appeared in person. Code Enforcement Officer Sasha James stated the property was in such a state of uncleanliness as to be a menace to the public under Section 21-19-11 of the Mississippi Code and asked the Mayor and Council to adjudicate the property as such and that an Order be entered to such effect, requested **immediate abatement** and that an Order be issued for the property. Council Member Greene made a motion in accordance with Section 21-19-11 of the Mississippi Code, and for an Order stating the City may remove dilapidated buildings or dilapidated fences up to six (6) more times in the twelve (12) month period immediately following the Order and cutting grass and weeds and removing rubbish, personal property and other debris no more than twelve (12) times in a twenty-four (24) month period. Council Member Stewart seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

LAWRENCE WILSON

319 23rd Street North

CASE NUMBER: 22-0190

CLOSING OF VACANT STRUCTURES

The General Counsel called cause number **22-0190**. No one appeared. Code Enforcement Officer Sasha James stated the property has been **remediated** by the owner, and it is her recommendation to enter the proposed Order under Section 21-19-11 of the Mississippi Code, finding that this property was in such a state of uncleanliness as to be a menace to the public health and safety of the community. This Order should provide for such re-entry as the Statute allows. Council Member Greene made a motion in accordance with Section 21-19-11, and for an Order stating the City may remediate the property with respect to cutting grass and weeds and removing rubbish, personal property and other debris no more than twelve (12) times in a twenty-four (24) month period immediately following the Order, with further notice to the owner as required by law. Costs are to be assessed as allowed under Section 21-19-11 of the Mississippi Code. Council Member Beard seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

B. Discuss/Approve Advertising for Bids for the Propst Park Youth Baseball Field Improvements

Council Member Jones made a motion to approve the request to advertise for Bids for the Propst Park Youth Baseball Field Improvements. Council Member Beard seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

C. Discuss/Approve rehiring one (1) CPD Officer, contingent on successful completion of all preliminary screening, to include a medical exam and drug screen.

Council Member Beard made a motion to approve the request to rehire Ms. Robin Conner, contingent on successful completion of all preliminary screening, to include a medical exam and drug screen. Council Member Jones seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

D. Discuss/Approve Request to apply for FY 2022 Edward Byrnes Justice Assistance Grant in the amount of \$12,852.00

Council Member Jones made a motion to approve the request to apply for FY 2022 Edward Byrnes Justice Assistance Grant in the amount of \$12,852.00, authorize the Mayor to sign all pertinent documentation concerning the grant and adopt a Resolution and an Inter-local Agreement between the City of Columbus and the County of Lowndes, Mississippi once the grant is awarded. No matching funds are required for this grant. The grant will be used to assist the Columbus Police Department in purchasing 12-gauge tactical shotguns. Council Member Beard seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

CLOSED DETERMINATION:

Council Member Beard made a motion to go into closed session to determine whether it is necessary to go into Executive Session. Council Member Diccio seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

All members of the public, with the exception of the Mayor, the Council, the General Counsel, the COO, the CFO, the Police Chief, and the HR Director, exited the meeting.

Mayor Gaskin apprised the Council of one (1) Pending Litigation matter and three (3) personnel matters involving the job performance of employees in the City of Columbus.

Council Member Jones made a motion to go in Executive Session to discuss one (1) Pending Litigation matter and three (3) personnel matters. Council Member Stewart seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

The COO announced to the general public outside the Council Chambers that the Council was going into Executive Session to discuss one (1) Pending Litigation matter and three (3) personnel matters.

I. EXECUTIVE SESSION

PERSONNEL MATTER (1)

The first personnel matter to come before the Mayor and City Council involves the job performance of an employee in the Police Department. Chief Shelton, Assistant Chief Johnson, Employee I. D. Number 1397 and the employee's legal counsel, Carson Thurman, were invited in the Court's Chambers. Upon a request by Chief Shelton to terminate Employee, I. D. Number 1397 for violating the Police Department's General Orders, State statutory law and the employee rules handbook, the employee's attorney spoke in her defense and denied that the accusations had merit. Employee, I. D. 1104, a shift supervisor, was invited in the Court Chambers and was questioned about the violations. All parties were asked to exit the Court Chambers for deliberation. Following deliberation, Council Member Greene made a motion to suspend Employee,

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I. D. Number 1397 for ten (10) working days without pay and require her to pay back the time she clocked in and did not work, but was paid.

SUBSTITUTE MOTION:

Council Member Diccico made a substitute motion to suspend Employee, I. D. Number 1397 for thirty (30) working days without pay and require her to pay back the money she was paid for overtime she claimed to have worked, but for which there was no written record indicating that she was approved by her shift supervisor to actually work.

Council Members Stewart, Jones and Diccico voted in favor of the motion. Council Members Mickens, Greene, and Beard opposed the motion, which presented a tie vote. Mayor Gaskin voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 4/3.

PERSONNEL MATTER (2):

The second personnel matter to come before the Mayor and Council involves an employee that was recently hired, but has not begun working. Following the hire, the employee notified the Police Department that her previous employer has launched an investigation for potential committing criminal acts while employed. Council Member Jones made a motion to rescind the hire of this applicant. Council Member Beard seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

PERSONNEL MATTER (3):

The third personnel matter to come before the Mayor and Council involves the volunteer Accountant in the Finance and Administration Department. Mr. Brigham discussed some of the tasks that she performs on a weekly basis and requested that she be hired as a part-time employee, up to 28 hours per week at an hourly rate of \$25.00 to extend through January 2023 to complete W2s and 1099s. The Council engaged in a lengthy discussion of this request and Council Member Greene made a motion to permit this individual to continue volunteering until the end of the year with no pay. Council Member Jones seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion except Council Member Diccico, who opposed.

The motion carried 5/1.

PENDING LITIGATION:

The General Counsel updated the Mayor and Council on the Pending Litigation matter involving the Bridge and discussed litigation strategies and negotiations, which if held in open would potentially have a detrimental effect on the litigation. No action was taken.

OPEN SESSION:

Council Member Mickens made a motion to end the discussion of these matters and return to Open Session. Council Member Beard seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

The COO announced to the general public outside the meeting room that the Council was back in Open Session.

The General Counsel announced that the Mayor and Council went in Executive Session to discuss three (3) personnel matters involving the job performance of an employee in the Police Department and voted to suspend the employee for thirty (30) working days without pay and require the employee to pay to pay back the money she was paid for overtime she claimed to have worked, but for which there was no written record indicating that she was approved by her shift supervisor to actually work; discussed the request to hire a volunteer on a part-time basis and denied the request; and rescinded the offer of employment for a Police Applicant and updated the Mayor and Council on a Pending Litigation matter.

ADJOURNMENT:

The Mayor then asked if there was any other business to come before the Mayor and City Council. There being none, Council Member Mickens moved that the meeting be adjourned. Upon second by Council Member Beard and unanimous vote, the Mayor announced that the meeting was ADJOURNED.

Approved by: _____
Keith Gaskin, Mayor

James "Jim" Brigham
CFO/Secretary-Treasurer/City Clerk