

MEETING OF THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL CITY OF COLUMBUS, MS January 16, 2024

The Mayor and City Council met in Regular Session on Tuesday, January 16, 2024 at 5:00 p.m. via ZOOM due to inclement weather. Mayor Keith Gaskin presided over the meeting and all Council Members were present. Also present were the General Counsel, the COO, CFO, Police Chief, HR Director, and all other Department Heads.

I. CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION:

Mayor Gaskin called the meeting to order and offered the Invocation.

II. CONFIRMATION OF/OR AMENDMENTS TO THE AGENDA:

Councilwoman Stewart made a motion to add Item “H” – Review Severe Weather Policy to the Policy Agenda and adopt the agenda as amended. Council Member Greene seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

III. APPROVE MINUTES FOR MEETING OF JANUARY 2, 2024:

Councilwoman DiCicco made a motion to approve the Minutes for the Meeting of January 2, 2024. Councilwoman Stewart 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 the “Engine Company Operations” to be held in Jackson, MS, and approve payment of \$365.00 for Registration, use of City vehicle for travel and reimbursement of meal expenses, all totaling \$590.00.
- B. Approve request for Fire and Rescue personnel, Josh Nolt, to attend “Truck Company Operations” to be held in Jackson, MS, and approve payment of

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\$365.00 for registration, use of a City vehicle for travel, and reimbursement of meal expenses, all totaling \$590.00.

- C. Accept letter of resignation from Fire and Rescue Engineer, Christopher Carter, effective February 23, 2024, and approve compensation of any unused vacation leave.
- D. Approve permit request submitted by Nancy Carpenter, on behalf of Columbus-Lowndes Convention & Visitors Bureau, to host "Catfish in the Alley" to be held on April 6, 2024, from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. with streets being blocked on Friday, April 5, 2024 from 12:00 noon until 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, April 6, 2024. *See attached map.*
- E. Approve request for Victim's Advocate Dorothy Sanders to attend the "OAIV Mandatory Orientation for Grant Awardees" to be held in Jackson, Mississippi and approve payment of \$206.36 for travel and reimbursement of meal expenses.
- F. Approve request for Property & Evidence Custodian, Courtney Malone, to attend a "General Police Photography Course" to be held in Chattanooga, Tennessee and approve payment of \$429.00 for registration, \$351.00 for lodging, use of a city vehicle for travel and reimbursement of meal expenses, all totaling \$1,168.00.
- G. Approve request for Townsend Park Blues-Southside Festival Funding in the amount of \$15,000.00 per the 2% Restaurant Tax Agreement to fund festivals in the City of Columbus.
- H. Approve request for the Mayor, City Council, COO, CFO, Interim City Planner, Police Chief and Court Administrator to attend the Mississippi Municipal League 93rd Annual Summer Conference to be held in Biloxi, MS and approve payment of registration, lodging, travel and meal expenses.
- I. Approve the 2% Tourism Tax Payment of \$25,000 to Lowndes County, \$20,833.33 to Golden Triangle Development LINK, \$33,333.33 to the City of Columbus and \$116,449.01 to Columbus Visitors Bureau, in the total amount of \$195,615.67.

Councilwoman DiCicco made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as prepared. Councilwoman Stewart seconded the motion. The Mayor called for discussion, and there being none, all Council Members voted in favor of same, with a unanimous vote, 6/0.

V. APPROVE DOCKET OF CLAIMS:

Council Member Greene made a motion to approve the Docket of Claims for January 16, 2024, in the amount of \$1,124,734.95. Councilwoman Stewart seconded the motion. Councilwoman DiCicco asked a question about one of the vouchers scheduled to be paid and her question was answered.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion, except Councilwoman DiCicco, who opposed.

The motion carried 5/1.

VI. REPORTS, PROCLAMATIONS, RECOGNITIONS AGENDA:

A. Mayor Gaskin thanked local churches, non-profits, businesses, community members, and all individuals involved for their participation and support of the MLK Breakfast and Day of Service events. We also thank Keith Worsham and others that are responsible for bringing the only survivor of the 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing in Birmingham, Alabama on September 15, 1963, Mrs. Sarah Collins Rudolph, to the Friendly City. Mayor Gaskin encouraged everyone to continue to work together as Dr. King advised to help make our world a better place to live in.

- We ask for prayers for employees that lost loved ones and are in bereavement:

Linda Holliman in City Hall (Loss of father)
Tammy Stanley in City Hall (Loss of mother-in-law)
Dalton Cook, Columbus Fire & Rescue, (Loss of Sister)

- Congratulations to Mrs. Raevonne Reece, Fire and Rescue Employee, who is celebrating the birth of her first child, a healthy baby boy.

B. Building Inspection – December 2023 Monthly Report

The Monthly Report from the Building Inspection Department for December 2023 was presented. No action was taken.

C. Friendship Cemetery & James M. Trotter Convention Center – December 2023 Monthly Report

The Monthly Report from Friendship Cemetery & James M. Trotter Convention Center for December 2023 was presented. No action was taken.

D. Columbus Fire and Rescue – December 2023 Monthly Report

The Monthly Report from the Fire and Rescue Department for December 2023 was presented. No action was taken.

E. Columbus Fire and Rescue 2023 Annual Report

Columbus Fire and Rescue Department presented the 2023 Annual Report. No action was taken.

F. Parks & Recreation – December 2023 Monthly Report

The Monthly Report from the Parks & Recreation Department for December 2023 was presented. The Director of Parks & Recreation was asked about improvements to the Parks. The COO reported that Weathers Construction, the contractor, has begun on the fields conversion. Softball fields are being converted to baseball fields and vice versa. The fencing has been removed. Councilwoman DiCicco requested updates to be included in the monthly reports. No action was taken.

G. Columbus Police Department – December 2023 Monthly Report

The Monthly Report from the Columbus Police Department for December 2023 was presented. Questions were directed to the Police Chief regarding DUIs. Chief Daughtry answered the questions. Councilwoman DiCicco also asked questions about the proposed Strategic Plan and requested more information.

H. Columbus Police Department – 2023 Annual Report

The Columbus Police Department presented the 2023 Annual Report. No action was taken.

I. Community Outreach – December 2023 Monthly Report

The Monthly Report from Community Outreach for December 2023 was presented. No action was taken.

J. Code Enforcement Department – December 2023 Monthly Report

The Monthly Report from the Code Enforcement Department for December 2023 was presented. A question was directed to the Code Enforcement Director regarding the description on a report. Code Enforcement Officer, Sasha James, answered by stating that once a case is complete, she then notates that it is closed out.

K. Office of Planning & Community Development – December 2023 Monthly Report

The Monthly Report from the Office of Planning & Community Development for December 2023 was presented. No action was taken.

L. Public Works – December 2023 Monthly report

The Monthly Report from the Public Works Department for December 2023 was presented. No action was taken.

M. Finance – December 2023 Monthly Report

Jim Brigham, CFO, distributed the Monthly Financial Report for December 2023, which includes the General Fund cash balance of \$7,134,032.88 and is an increase of \$2,437,965.34 compared to the same time last year. The Sales Tax Receipts for December had not been received when this report was completed. The remaining balance of ARPA Funds is \$3,069,968.93. The balance in the Bridge Repair Fund is \$3,281,861.90. The CFO also distributed an Expenditure Report by department. No action was taken.

N. Human Resources – December 2023 Monthly Report

The Monthly Report from the Human Resources Director for December 2023 was presented. No action was taken.

O. Municipal Court – December 2023 Monthly Report

The Monthly Report from the Municipal Court Division for December 2023 was presented. No action was taken.

P. Garage – December 2023 Monthly Report

The Monthly Report from the Garage Department for December 2023 was presented. No action was taken.

Q. Board Vacancies

Jammie Garrett, COO announced vacancies on various boards, as follows:

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

2 Vacancies, 3-Year Terms, Wythe Rhett and Quinn Brislin's Terms
Expire 1/20/2024.

Appointment will be made January 16, 2024.

APPLICANTS:

Wythe Rhett
Quinn Brislin

Council Member Beard made a motion to reappoint Wythe Rhett and Quinn Brislin to the City Planning Commission for 3-Year Terms, until January 20, 2027. Council Member Greene seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

COLUMBUS MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

1 Vacancy – 5-Year Term, Fredrick Sparks' Term Expires 3/05/2024.
Appointment will be made February 20, 2024.

APPLICANTS:

Beverly Odom
James Richardson

VII. CITIZENS INPUT AGENDA:

Sharon Chambry Butler, Request Use of Trotter Convention Center

Ms. Sharon Chambry Butler requested the City to allow her to use the Trotter Convention Center to host meetings (2-day event) to assist small businesses and discuss opportunities for them to be more successful. The Council engaged in a discussion of this request and remarked that the City does not allow free use of the Convention Center. This request was taken under consideration.

VIII. POLICY AGENDA:

A. Discuss/Approve Derelict Property Docket

SHANNON J. MERCHANT

c/o SHANNON BOWEN

1015 Park Circle

CASE NUMBER: 23-0146 Burned Structure

This case was heard January 2, 2024. The General Counsel reported that Ms. Bowen and her Legal Counsel were on the phone. Ms. Roechelle Morgan, General Counsel with Webb Sanders & Williams, PLLC was also on ZOOM. Council Member Jones made a motion to extend the remediation of

this case until February 20, 2024 to allow neighbors to attend the meeting.
Council Member Beard seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

B. Discuss/Approve Recommendations from the January 8, 2024 Planning Commission Meeting

Permitted Use Request 24-01

On Behalf of Crossroads of Columbus
125 Yorkville Road West
Tax Parcel 69W22-00-16100

The Planning Commission recommends approval to allow the existing former church building to be used as a drug and alcohol rehabilitation living facility and the former parsonage be used as the Director's or Staff's living area.

The Commission based their decision on a public need and no significant objection from the neighbors in the immediate vicinity.

Council Member Mickens moved that the facts and findings of the Planning Commission be adopted as the facts and findings of the Mayor and City Council, and that the recommendation of the Planning Commission to allow the existing former church building to be used as a drug and alcohol rehabilitation living facility and the former parsonage be used as the Director's or Staff's living area be approved. Council Member Greene seconded the motion.

SUBSTITUTE MOTION:

Councilwoman Stewart made a substitute motion to table this request for one (1) month until the second week in March. Councilwoman DiCicco seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

C. Discuss/Approve request from the Columbus Police Department to receive the reimbursement check for Officers' CTT training and for the reimbursement to be placed in the training budget of the Columbus Police Department

Council Member Jones made a motion to approve the request from the Columbus Police Department to receive the reimbursement check for Officers' CTT training and for the reimbursement to be placed in the training budget of the Columbus Police Department. Council Member Beard seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

D. Discuss/Approve request to hire a Reserve Officer as a full-time Police Officer

Council Member Beard made a motion to hire Reserve Officer Eric M. Lewis as a full-time Police Officer, pending completion of all required testing. Council Member Greene seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

E. Discuss/Approve request to hire two (2) Certified Police Officers, contingent on successful completion of all preliminary testing

Council Member Beard made a motion to hire Traveon Williams and Brian Webster as Certified Police Officers, contingent on successful completion of all preliminary testing. Councilwoman Stewart seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

F. Discuss/Approve Amendment to the City's Substance Abuse Policy

Pat Mitchell, Human Resources Director, submitted a request to Amend the City's Substance Abuse Policy as a result of the Mississippi Legislature's final approval to the Mississippi Medical Cannabis Act (SB 2095). The H R Director plans to meet with all departments and inform them of this Amendment, but also to inform them that the adoption of the Mississippi Medical Cannabis Act does not change the City's Substance Abuse Policy; the City will continue to enforce a ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICY and test employees to ensure that they are not working under the influence of illegal drugs, alcohol and medical cannabis. Council Member Beard made a motion to approve the request to amend the City's Substance Abuse Policy and

include the amendment in the Employee Handbook. Council Member Greene seconded the motion. Upon a request by Council Member Mickens, Ms. Mitchell read the policy.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

THE AMENDMENT TO THE SUBSTANCE ABUSE POLICY FOLLOWS:

- *The City of Columbus is not required to permit, accommodate, or allow the use of medical cannabis, or to modify any job or working conditions for any employee who engages in the medical use of cannabis.*
- *The City of Columbus may refuse to hire an applicant and can take an adverse employment action against an employee, up to and including termination, “as a result, in whole or in part, of that employee’s medical use of medical cannabis,” regardless of the employee’s impairment or lack of impairment resulting from the medical use of cannabis.*
- *The City of Columbus may discipline “an employee for ingesting medical cannabis in the workplace or for working while under the influence of medical cannabis.”*
- *The City of Columbus may continue to enforce a drug-testing policy.*
- *The Mississippi Medical Cannabis Act (MMCA) does not create a private right of action by an employee against an employer nor does it “affect the existing legal relationship between an employer and employee or any employee or any existing law or regulation relating to such relationship.”*

Employers and their workers’ compensation carrier or other insurance carriers are not required to pay for or to reimburse an employee for the costs associated with the medical use of cannabis.

*Amended by Mayor and City Council
January 16, 2024*

G. Discuss/Approve request to rehire a former Public Works Department Employee that left the City in good standing, pending successful completion of all preliminary testing.

Council Member Jones made a motion to rehire Courtney Beckwith as an Operator, pending successful completion of all preliminary testing. Council Member Beard seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

H. Discuss/Approve applying for Strategic Multimodal Investment Funds for CLCA Hangar Replacement Project.

Council Member Beard made a motion to approve the request to apply for the Strategic Multimodal Investment Funds for CLCA Hangar Replacement Project. The Grant does not require a match, but Zach Foster, Engineer with Neel-Schaffer, Inc. requested that the City approve 5% matching funds to make grant more competitive and increase the City's odds of receiving the grant, for which BIL funds can applied toward the cost. A match will not be necessary if the Grant is not awarded. Council Member Greene seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

I. Review Severe Weather Policy

EXTREME WEATHER

The Mayor may grant administrative leave with pay to City employees in the event of extreme weather conditions or in the event of a manmade, technological or natural disaster or emergency.

Mayor Gaskin and COO Garrett discussed the Extreme Weather Policy that's in the Employee Handbook and made the decision to tell employees not to report for work today due to inclement and extreme weather conditions and requests that the Council ratify their decision. They also requested that the employees not report for work on January 17. Council Member Beard made a motion to ratify the Mayor's and COO's decision to excuse employees from work on January 16, 2024 and approve the request to excuse employees from work on January 17, 2024 due to extreme weather conditions. Councilwoman Stewart seconded the motion.

All Council Members voted in favor of the motion.

The motion carried 6/0.

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ADJOURNMENT:

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

Approved by: _____
Keith Gaskin, Mayor

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

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