

September 12, 2023

**MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
SEPTEMBER 12, 2023**

The Council for the City of Covington held their regular meeting on Tuesday, September 12, 2023 at 6:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall located at 333 W. Locust Street, Covington, Virginia.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Thomas H. Sibold, Jr. with the following members present: Mayor Sibold; Vice Mayor David S. Crosier; Councilman William (Lance) E. Carson, Jr.; Councilman Fred F. Forbes; Councilman Raymond C. Hunter. Also present were City Manager Allen Dressler and City Attorney Mark Popovich.

The invocation was given by Pastor Doug Hollenbeck followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Crosier motioned to approve the agenda with the addition of appointing a Council Member to the Economic Development Corporation, which was seconded by Mr. Hunter. All members were in favor with "aye" votes.

Citizen Comments

Mr. Paul McCoy, Idlewilde, inquired as to whether or not Michigan and Greenway heading up the hill would be paved in the near future, stating that it was badly in need of repair. He questioned why Maple Avenue was done but other streets in need of fixing had not. Mr. Dressler stated that bids for paving were going out soon, and advised it may be paved in early spring and advised Mr. McCoy the Maple Avenue Project was funded mostly by the Virginia Department of Transportation after he mentioned the city spending a lot in the downtown area. Mr. McCoy stated that the previous City Manager had told him that the city had more money than they knew what to do with. Mr. Dressler assured him that was not true. Mr. Sibold requested for Allen to follow up with Mr. McCoy with regards to the paving in that particular area. Mr. Dressler assured him that he would.

Public Hearing

A Public Hearing was held with regards to real property tax rate increases.

Mr. Rob Bennet thanked Council for allowing him to serve one last time on the Board of Equalization. He was on City Council for eight years. He expressed his pleasure at serving on the board with Cathy Kimberlin, Richard Fuhrman, and Kathy Lytle, stating that she was a vital asset to the BOE since she is in real estate. He is opposed to keeping the tax rate at 85 cents per hundred, as keeping the rate in the high 70s will still bring in some revenue. He stated that the city received a half million dollar windfall recently from the collection of personal property taxes and did not need another one in the upcoming year. He went on to say that his real property assessment went up 36 percent in value, and most others' assessments are a good deal higher, even after individuals spoke with the assessor and Board of Equalization. He has four widows living in his neighborhood. The extra 500 dollars could go towards copays, gasoline, therapy, food, utilities, all of which are already sky high. Mr. Bennett stated that he loves this city and has dedicated his adult life to this city, but Covington has an aging population with no growth or new jobs. He implored Council to lower the tax rate, and take in a little revenue but not a windfall such as with personal property taxes.

September 12, 2023

Mrs. Eunice Clark is opposed to keeping the tax rate at 85 cents per hundred. She advised that the city's population has dropped to 5,500, and that children finish college and don't come home. She asked Council to please reconsider the tax rate, and said that the middle of the road would be reasonable. She questioned as to why there was such an increase, as she was under the impression that taxes would decrease once the schools were consolidated. She stated that the older generation is passing away and the tax rate needed to be lowered to 75 cents per hundred. If the city doesn't hold on to the citizens they have, they will have no one to tax. She requested that Council reconsider the tax rate and take it down at least somewhat.

Mr. Eric Tyree spoke in favor of keeping the tax rate at 85 cents per hundred. He said as an investor, property owner, and business owner, he understands the money necessary for the improvements the citizens want and expect. He knows how much things cost and how the revenue is generated for the city. He said the work the city is doing is important to him, and he would like to see those things continue.

Mayor Sibold closed the Public Hearing

Mr. Crosier moved to approve the minutes for the regular meeting held on August 8th, 2023, seconded by Mr. Hunter. All members were in favor with "aye" votes.

Appointments

Mr. Crosier motioned to appoint Mr. Carson to fill his seat on the Economic Development Corporation effective immediately, seconded by Mr. Hunter. All members were in favor with "aye" votes.

Mr. Crosier motioned to approve Resolution R-23-26, amending appropriations for fiscal year beginning July 1, 2023 and ending June 30, 2024, seconded by Mr. Carson. All members were in favor with "aye" votes.

Mr. Crosier motioned to approve the submission of a letter of support from Covington City Council to the Allegheny Foundation for the construction of Casey Field/Boodie Albert Stadium. The motion was seconded by Mr. Carson. All members were in favor with "aye" votes.

Ms. Kim Halterman and Mr. Eric Tyree spoke with regards to capital improvement projects for the Allegheny Highlands Public School System. The terms of the funding agreement between the city, county, and school system indicates that when funds exceed 100 thousand dollars each, that the school brings those to Council for approval. These projects are already in the budget, so there is no request for additional funding. Several are dollars related to pandemic funds or the joint school division incentive funds received from the state. Mayor Sibold inquired about the new track for Allegheny High School. Ms. Halterman advised the track was in a separate fund. Mr. Eric Tyree advised that new roofs for Jackson River Technical Center and Allegheny High School are badly needed. The project is currently out for bid. There are gym renovations for Allegheny High School. Painting is needed at the middle and high school. Security in the form of digital cloud based cameras is being implemented. Outdoor classrooms for our elementary schools are being constructed and HVAC improvements are being implemented using funds from the Covid pandemic. She said that they believe they will present another presentation to Council soon with regards to roof repair at Jackson River Technical Center and Allegheny High School once they have more information regarding cost of repair. Pandemic dollars will be used for this project.

September 12, 2023

Mr. Tyree advised that the gymnasium renovations at the high school include new flooring, painting the entire facility, new bleacher seats. Painting at the middle and elementary schools is necessary due to the consolidation and color changes. Cloud based cameras will be installed for security. Eссор funds for outdoor classroom spaces will be used for Mountainview Elementary, Sharon Elementary, and Callaghan Elementary. There are already outdoor classroom spaces at Jeter Watson and Covington Middle School, with essor funds being used.

Mr. Crosier motioned to approve the Capital Improvement Project request, seconded by Mr. Hunter. The roll call votes were as follows: Mr. Carson, for; Mr. Forbes, for; Mr. Hunter, for; Vice Mayor Crosier, for; Mayor Sibold, for.

Ms. Ingrid Barber, Alleghany Highlands Community Services Board, spoke with regards to AHCSB's Performance Contract. She started off by thanking Council for their support and contributions this year, which supports the CSB and the jail programs they provide. She stated that they were taking some new initiatives and they are working on expanding substance abuse services. They will be applying for an opioid abatement grant in excess of 2 million dollars. They are also expanding support of housing for individuals with mental health issues, and having crisis receiving centers and stabilization units. They are looking at the Low Moor area, as it is close to the hospital. Ms. Barber wants to ensure that our area is not left behind, as the AHCSB is currently serving 14, 000 individuals in this area. She advised that finding workers was difficult, but they were doing the best they could. There is a Gala celebration occurring in October. Ms. Barber advised there was not a lot of flexibility concerning funding. They are anticipating four million ninety seven thousand dollars for mental health, four million 160 thousand six hundred forty three dollars, with the biggest growth being in substance use, which is 1 million 425 thousand 715 dollars. The total cost is 9 million 586 thousand 455 dollars. In addition, the cost for emergency services is anticipated at 1 million 322 thousand 81 dollars. This service is provided 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The total cost is 11 million 244 thousand 438 dollars. They try to keep their overhead low, as only 16.6 percent of the total represents administrative costs.

Mr. Crosier moved to approve the performance contract of the AHCSB, seconded by Mr. Hunter. The roll call votes were as follows: Mr. Carson, for; Mr. Forbes, for; Mr. Hunter, for; Vice Mayor Crosier, for; Mayor Sibold, for.

Rayon Bridge

Mr. Dressler advised Council that construction was scheduled for the Rayon Bridge in 2026. He stated that it was in the best interest of the city not to manage the project, and that VDOT would administer the managing and engineering part of the bridge. Mr. Crosier inquired as to what plan VDOT had chosen to go with. Mr. Dressler advised they were planning to leave the existing bridge while constructing the new one. Mayor Sibold stated the VDOT had been very kind to the city over the last few years with regards to projects and unexpected repairs.

Real Property Tax

Mr. Sibold advised that the tax rate affects much more than real estate if lowered. Things such as the composite index and school funding will be affected. Mr. Dressler advised that there is \$600 thousand set aside for paving. Mr. Sibold said there were a lot of high dollar projects needed in the city and Mr. Crosier stated that a lot of cans had been kicked down the road that were having to be addressed now.

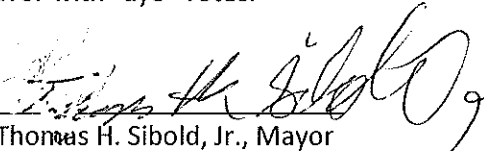
September 12, 2023

Cathy Kimberlin, Commissioner of Revenue, stated that properties are selling for more than they are worth, which affects how the assessor determines the rate. She said there is a tax relief program for people 65 and older or people with a permanent disability. As of right now, the maximum relief is \$200, but she is planning to come before Council in the near future to request an increase in that amount. She advised that citizens need to file for the relief in February of each year and bring documents including Social Security statements, bank statements, proof of income.

New Business

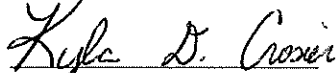
Mr. Pat Loving, owner and operator of Loving Funeral Home, sent a letter to Mr. Dressler, Mayor Sibold, and the City of Covington commending employees of Hammond and Mitchell and H&M Electric for a job well done with regards to the Maple Avenue/Phase 3 Project.

With no further business to come before Council, the meeting was adjourned on a motion from Mr. Crosier, seconded by Mr. Carson. All members were in favor with "aye" votes.



Thomas H. Sibold, Jr., Mayor

Attest:



Kyla D. Crosier, City Clerk