

COUNCIL CHAMBER - CITY HALL - GADSDEN, ALABAMA
JULY 7, 2020 - 11:00 A.M.

The City Council met on July 7, 2020, in regular session.

The meeting was called to order at 11:00 a.m. by Council President Toles. On roll call by the City Clerk, Iva Nelson, the following council members answered present: Toles, Williams, Worthy, Back, Wilson, Cannon and Reed. The clerk stated a quorum was present and the meeting was open for business. Mayor Guyton, Heath Williamson, Lee Roberts and Chief Jaggars were also present.

The invocation was given by Heath Williamson.

Breonna Cole, Emergency Management Agency, provided an update on Covid-19, noting that Etowah County has been designated a high-risk category. The cases total 790, with 322 new cases in the last 14 days, and 13 deaths have occurred. Ms. Cole announced testing sites and the upcoming social media campaign (#masksupetowah).

The minutes of the Public Safety Committee, Work Session and Council meeting held on June 30, 2020, were approved by unanimous vote.

Payment of the HTE System accounts for the week of June 26-July 2, 2020, were ratified by unanimous vote.

#201165-201264	General	\$778,512.72
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UNFINISHED BUSINESS

(1) The following resolution, which was introduced as an item of new business on June 30 but failed to receive unanimous consent for immediate consideration, was presented for consideration:

RESOLUTION NO. R-136-20

TO STAY ACTION REGARDING
EMMA SANSOM MONUMENT

(Expressing intent to not relocate, remove, alter, rename or otherwise disturb Emma Sansom monument located at western end of Broad Street Bridge across Coosa River - Note: Affirming that Alabama Memorial Preservation Act relating to monuments situated on public property for more than 40 years will not be knowingly violated)

Councilwoman Reed moved to adopt the resolution, which motion was seconded by Councilman Cannon and adopted by the following vote:

AYES: Toles, Back, Cannon, Reed

NAYS: Williams, Worthy, Wilson

(2) A resolution renaming Forrest Cemetery to Freedom Memorial Cemetery, which was introduced as an item of new business on June 30 but failed to receive unanimous consent for immediate consideration, was presented for consideration. In response to Councilman Wilson's inquiry, City Attorney Lee Roberts explained the original four plats recorded for the cemetery's subdivision were spelled "Forest." When the chapel and other structures were built under the WPA in the 1930's, some court actions were spelled "Forrest" (like General Forrest). Deeds inconsistently contain both spellings. A lengthy discussion followed regarding the Alabama Memorial Preservation Act, laws/restrictions concerning changes to subdivisions, and the possibility of trust provisions. Councilman Williams said the resolution was drafted to not conflict with the act and would not change the name of the chapel, comfort station, or the front gates, nor would it affect individual deeds. Councilman Wilson described the resolution as a symbolic gesture to the community that people can work together. Councilman Cannon said he had received numerous emotional calls asking for no change to be made. He said previous roads were closed to make room for more grave spaces.

Councilman Cannon moved to adopt the resolution, which motion was seconded by Councilman Williams, but failed to carry by the following vote:

AYES: Williams, Worthy, Wilson

NAYS: Toles, Back, Cannon, Reed

PUBLIC HEARING

The floor was opened to allow anyone to speak for or in opposition to a resolution approving the issuance of an alcoholic beverage license for Tut Hookah Lounge at 630 Broad Street. No one spoke. The following resolution was presented for consideration:

RESOLUTION NO. R-137-20

APPROVING THE ISSUANCE OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE LICENSE

(Omarelfarouk Moustafa Lotfi - Omarz, LLC - Tut Hookah Lounge - 630 Broad Street - District 5 - Lounge Retail Liquor License, Class I)

Councilman Worthy moved to adopt the resolution as introduced, which motion was seconded by Councilman Williams and adopted by the following vote:

AYES: Toles, Williams, Worthy, Back, Wilson

NAYS: Cannon, Reed

RESOLUTION PRESENTED FOR CONSIDERATION

The following resolution was introduced in writing for consideration:

RESOLUTION NO. R-138-20

AUTHORIZING CHANGE ORDER #1 FOR BID NO. 3403

(Authorizing Change Order #1 - Bid No. 3403 - New maintenance facility at Forrest Cemetery - Additional \$454.78 to reconcile additions and deletions to contract - Adjusting contract price with Greer Building Contractors to \$474,924.78)

Councilman Back moved to adopt the resolution as introduced, which motion was seconded by Councilman Wilson and adopted by the following vote:

AYES: Toles, Worthy, Back, Wilson, Cannon, Reed

NAYS: Williams

NEW BUSINESS

(1) Councilman Williams introduced the following resolution in writing for consideration:

RESOLUTION NO. R-139-20

AUTHORIZING PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT

(Authorizing public hearing on July 21, 2020 - Regarding proposed Economic Development Agreement with Wakefield's, Inc. - Relating to location of Martins Family Clothing Store at 1001 Rainbow Drive, Gadsden Mall)

President Toles received unanimous consent to immediately consider the resolution as an item of new business. Councilman Williams moved to adopt the resolution, which motion was seconded by Councilman Worthy and unanimously adopted.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Lisa Rosser, Finance Director, presented the financial report for June collections, which reflect May's taxes, pointing out many businesses were closed until mid-May. She expressed relief that current Covid-19 impact stands at 3%, noting that Federal stimulus payments and expanded unemployment benefits have given citizens more money to spend. She said city expenditures were also drastically reduced; however, debt payments become due this month.

CITIZEN REQUESTS

Kathye Vance cited various situations from her personal history that were discriminatory toward herself and others. She explained the process leading up to adoption of the smoke free ordinance, which she felt treated businesses the same. Ms. Vance objected to the exception granted in January 2020 for hookah bars and requested that it be repealed.

Emma Clapp, new Executive Director of the Family Success Center, explained the center has continued providing services, some of them being free, although their doors were closed. She announced an event on July 25 that will include food, voter registration, census response assistance, and a blood drive. Ms. Clapp noted that free antibody testing will be provided for anyone who donates blood.

Glenda Jackson expressed concern about negativity in the community and stressed the need for unity. She affirmed her faith and Christian values, expressed appreciation for the work of the mayor and council, and recited the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi.

MAYOR AND COUNCIL REMARKS

Mayor Guyton encouraged citizens to take advantage of training and grants through Gadsden State Community College and to apply for jobs.

The Mayor and Councilmen Worthy, Back, and Wilson joined in urging citizens to respond to the census. Councilman Williams announced a voter registration and census event on July 11 at the corner of Tuscaloosa Avenue and Spring Street. Councilman Worthy noted an attorney will be present to advise citizens about voting rights. Councilman Wilson advised he would be coming to the homes of his constituents to help with their census responses.

Councilmen Worthy urged the public to wear masks and stated his desire to consider an ordinance requiring it. Councilman Back commended local businesses and first responders, and announced a press conference at 10 a.m. on Thursday to discuss masks and other Covid matters.

Councilman Williams expressed disappointment in today's vote to protect monuments but thanked the council for the civil discussion. He said the discussion will continue and reiterated his request for the formation of a subcommittee to study options. Councilman Williams expressed personal regards for a number of persons and confidence that the city will overcome these and other challenges. He referred to the loss of Goodyear and pointed out the city had no role in the process and was allowed no input into the decision.

Councilman Worthy expressed disappointment in today's missed opportunity to consider the feelings of black persons. He stressed the need to retain our young people for the work force. Councilman Worthy advised non profit organizations can apply for grants at The Chamber of Commerce.

Councilman Back announced food distribution at First Baptist Church at 2 p.m. on Wednesday. He thanked Councilman Williams for his remarks and said he has experienced heart change through prayer, research and talking with others. Councilman Back pointed out that Gadsden has two statues of women (Emma Sansom and Princess Noccalula), which number less than 200 in the U.S. He described today's vote as premature and pledged to continue the conversation.

Councilman Wilson said he feels it's time to move forward and quit hanging on to the past in regard to the statue. He agreed with the need for a committee and stated the importance of balancing experience and new ideas. Councilman Wilson expressed care for our city and encouraging young people to stay here.

Councilman Cannon said his grandparents owned property at Forrest Cemetery and affirmed that some roads had been closed to make room for more grave spaces. He referred to calls from others who have loved ones buried there and did not want the name to be changed. Councilman Cannon encouraged his fellow council members and stressed the importance of focusing on creating jobs and building our economy.

Councilmen Reed and Back joined in thanking Glenda Jackson for her heart-felt remarks and prayer.

Councilman Reed encouraged the council to work for the people during this time of financial difficulty. He complimented the Patriots Association for the fireworks display on July 4 and thanked the police department for assistance with security.

Councilwoman Toles thanked the citizens for their support and the opportunity to serve, and stressed the need to remain focused on accomplishing true reform in policing, the criminal justice system, and mental health, rather than tearing down statues. She stated there were four black council members in the previous term and the issue didn't arise. Councilwoman Toles referred to those who are anticipating a race riot to spark and affirmed her commitment to fight and work for the people and to vote her conscience.

There being no further business to come before the Council, the meeting was duly adjourned.

Iva Nelson, City Clerk (7-7-2020)
