

REGULAR MEETING – CAIRO MAYOR & COUNCIL – APRIL 22, 2024

The April 22, 2024, Regular Meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m. in the Council Chambers with Mayor Booker T. Gainor, IV presiding. Present were Councilmembers Demario Bryden, James H. Douglas, Timothy Gurley, Annette Higdon, and Charles Renaud. Staff Members in attendance were City Manager Julian Brown, City Clerk Dana W. Barfield, and City Attorney Tom Lehman. Cairo Messenger Reporter Meshia Wind was also in attendance.

INVOCATION: The Invocation was given by Mayor Booker T. Gainor, IV.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: Motion to approve the agenda was made by Councilman Douglas, seconded by Councilman Gurley, and passed unanimously by all Council Members.

Councilman Renaud made a motion to add the pledge of allegiance to the beginning of each meeting, it was seconded by Councilman Douglas, and passed unanimously by all Council Members.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Regular Meeting – April 8, 2024. Motion to approve the minutes was made by Councilman Gurley, seconded by Councilman Douglas, and unanimously approved by all Council Members.

DELEGATIONS:

SPECIAL EVENTS:

Consider Special Event/Downtown Street Closure Permit – Diane Gurley/Fresh Start Outreach Ministries – Juneteenth Festival, June 15, 2024, from 11:00 am to 6:00 pm (street to be barred at 7:00 am). Diane Gurley/Fresh Start Outreach Ministries – Applicant. Ms. Diane Gurley explained that she would like to have a Juneteenth event to celebrate June 19th because this was the day slaves were freed and for years, they have been celebrating the wrong day on July 4th. Therefore, she would like to have this day with black vendors, a speaker, and entertainment and planned to start at 11:00 am and end at 6:00 pm. Councilman Douglas stated the Police Chief had a question about closing the streets off at 7:00 am, Ms. Gurley said she had spoken with Ms. Searcy the Mainstreet Director, and she advised to give at least two hours before setup. Mayor Gainor asked if this was a city sponsored event. Ms. Gurley said she was told it was not a city sponsored event, but City Clerk Barfield had told her the fee could be exempt. Councilman Byrden asked if it would be a co-sponsored event. Ms. Gurley said it would be herself and Fresh Start sponsoring the event. Mayor Gainor said that he thought there was a discussion last year about making the event a co-sponsored event, Councilman Douglas said he thought that it would be as well. Councilman Gurley asked if she knew how many vendors would be there, Ms. Gurley said she would have sixteen vendors and had a map of where they would be placed that Ms. Searcy had given her. Councilman Renaud asked if the vendors would be paying a fee and if so, how much. Ms. Gurley said yes, the vendors would be paying \$60 each. Mayor Gainor asked if this was a city sponsored event would there be a vendor fee, Ms. Gurley responded no. Mayor Gainor asked if she was charging the vendor fees to offset the cost of the event and Ms. Gurley agreed. Mayor Gainor said again that if this was a city sponsored event then she would not be charging for the event, with Ms. Gurley replying, no. Councilman Gurley said he was concerned about having sixteen vendors, he thought this was the most vendors there had been at any downtown event. City Manager Brown added that Mistletoe Market has more vendors than this. Mayor Gainor asked if they wanted to make it a city sponsored event and Councilwoman Higdon asked if they could; City Manager Brown added that the fee could also be waived if the council wanted to do so. Mayor Gainor said for perception if the fee were going to be waived then it needed to be made a city sponsored event as well. Councilman Gurley attempted to make a motion, however Councilman Byrden interrupted and said that since it was involving Fresh Start Outreach Ministries then Councilmembers Gurley and Higdon needed to abstain since it was their church sponsoring the event. Both Councilmembers said they would abstained from voting. Councilman Byrden made a motion to approve the Juneteenth Festival, with also waiving the fee and making it a city sponsored event, seconded by Councilman Douglas, and approved by Councilman Renaud.

OLD BUSINESS:

NEW BUSINESS:

Consider Diving Platform for Holder Park Pool. City Manager Brown said that in the past there have been issues with the diving boards malfunctioning at Holder Park Pool and was asked to look at some different options to replace them. There were three options found that did not have a lot of difference other than the pricing. His recommendation was the Katzowen Diving Platform for \$479.00. Councilman Gurley said he did not see any rails to help you get onto them. City Manager Brown stated that the only history he had was from previous years on the swim team and the platforms do not have rails. Mayor Gainor said that if he correctly recalled the reason the diving boards kept breaking in the same spot was because that particular area was unlevel, that was why he thought maybe a diving platform would be more sustainable. City Manager Brown said with platforms insurance companies do not look at as harshly as they do diving boards. Mayor Gainor asked if price was not an option, would City Manager

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Brown still choose the same platform. The City Manager said when looking at the reviews they were all about the same. Councilman Renaud added that he felt the Doheny looked like it was a little more dangerous with the spikes that it had coming out the back of it. Mayor Gainor asked if they were coming out the back or were they under the platform. Councilman Renaud said they are even with the platform. Councilwoman Higdon said that it was mentioned that the diving boards were breaking due to the construction of the area, would it be safer to fix that area so that the diving boards could remain and not continue to break. City Manager Brown said since he had been here there had not been any diving boards and asked if the rails were still there. Mayor Gainor said the housing was there but not the board, so during the summer they put tape around the area to keep the kids from going near it. Councilman Renaud asked if there would be a change in the insurance if we added it back. City Manager Brown responding that it does but it was not a drastic amount as you would expect with liability, but he thought they were not replaced because it was happening so often. Councilman Renaud added that they were not cheap. Councilman Byrden asked if there were platforms with rails on the side that they could view. City Manager Brown said that we could keep looking for other platforms. Motion to table the diving platforms for Holder Park Pool until more options could be brought back was made by Councilman Byrden, seconded by Councilman Gurley, and unanimously approved by all Council Members.

Consider Municipal Competitive Trust (MCT) Withdrawal. City Manager Brown explained that the GIRMA insurance premium was due in the amount of \$354,000 and with the cost of business going up in every aspect he was recommending withdrawing \$500,000 from the Municipal Competitive Trust fund. Motion to approve withdrawing \$500,000 from the Municipal Competitive Trust fund was made by Councilman Douglas, seconded by Councilman Renaud, and unanimously approved by all Council Members. Mayor Gainor asked how we would use the remaining \$146,000, City Manager Brown responded possibly with garbage.

Consider Proposed Rate Increase for FY 2024-2025 Budget. City Manager Brown explained that the Mayor had challenged himself as well as the staff to consider different revenue sources and when you consider revenue sources you want to make sure you are being fair to the customers as well. The first one he wanted to discuss was our electric meter base rate that was \$10, and showed a breakdown of other electric providers in the surrounding areas. The last time the city made an adjustment for electricity was over ten years ago. He went on to say that as we have all seen the cost of things go up, it has also effected the city for each department across the board. He explained that this was not something that needed to be decided on tonight, he just wanted to ask the council to consider this as we were moving into the budget. He wanted to show how Vogtle affected our MEAG bill and that was for the Vogtle Plant 3, Vogtle Plant 4 would be coming on line soon and that would add additional cost to our bill. He went on to say he wanted the public and everyone else to be able to understand that when you hear about Vogtle they were a nuclear plant and they have just recently opened up the newest plant #3 and will be opening up #4 and MEAG and Georgia Power, which includes municipalities have to pay for these plants, which makes our bill go up; effecting our costs. He said the second option was more unique and creative that Fire Chief Cole Prince came up with that he will present. Fire Chief Prince came forward and explained that his proposal was to institute a water meter fee earmarked for major equipment purchases, major equipment repair, and infrastructural repairs for the fire department. What he was asking for is a \$4 monthly fee on water meters, that would keep the cost to the consumers under \$50 annually and would generate approximately \$217,680 per year based on our current number of meters. Engine 1 that is in use now is about 8 ½ years old now, the purchase order for that truck was \$448,802, since then the price of that truck had gone up 113%. He said he quoted the same truck with the same specs as Engine 1 and the price came back at \$955,965 and that is the base truck. He went on to explain that it takes approximately 2 ½ years to complete the total build of the truck from the time you sign the purchase order. If this proposal were implemented by 2029 there would almost be enough to completely pay for the engine without having to finance anything. Chief Prince also explained that for the infrastructural repairs, the concrete on the apron of the fire department was cracked and in disrepair. He said it was found that the issue was sand underneath the concrete and water was getting underneath washing it out causing it to crack and break. He said the rough estimate for concrete and replacement is approximately \$288,000, that does not include demolition of the current concrete or dirt work that would have to be done to make it suitable for concrete to be re-poured. He went on to explain that the major equipment purchases the department would be needing were Self-Contained Breathing Apparatuses, one SCBA cost \$9,900. The SCBAs they were using now were ten years old and they were about to come out with a new National Fire Protection Association standard which will put the departments SCBAs two cycles out which is considered obsolete by NFPA standards. Lastly, he added that the department's turnout gear for each firefighter cost about \$4,500 per set. Fire Chief Prince ended by saying that by adding this fee it would be a way to be able to pay for all of these cost and plan to pay for it in the future and not have to stress anything else any further. He added that their vehicles in the past had always been paid for through SPLOST, but everyone knew that could change at any moment due to the economic situation on how voters felt about it. This was just a way to plan for the future and possibly free up SPLOST for other projects. Mayor Gainor said that this was a very creative and thorough report. He also asked if there was an alternative to the concrete such as asphalt or any type of hot mix, Chief Prince said there has to be a base there that can support the weight of the trucks, it would have to be something that could be built up strong enough to hold the weight of the trucks coming in daily. Mayor Gainor also asked what type of account the funds would be deposited into.

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City Manager Brown said he thought the goal was to put the money into a separate account so that it would not be touched until a fire truck were purchased, that way we would be able to show the public this is what the water fees were able to do. Councilman Renaud said on number four of his proposal, he had \$231,504 if he replaced sixteen SCBAs and turnout gear that would go to that for one year. Chief Prince said that he also has submitted an AFG grant to replace SCBAs and turnout gear, so he was hoping they would be able to replace some of those through the grant, but he would not know about that until possibly the end of the year. City Manager Brown said that if this would allow the city to possibly pay for half of a fire truck, that goes a long way and as Chief Prince said a lot of the equipment is funded through SPLOST and that will free up money in the future or as he said it could possibly go away. Mayor Gainor asked if this would be a flat rate for all customers or would there be different rates for residential and commercial customers. Chief Prince said he had just done a flat rate of \$4 across the board, Mayor Gainor asked if that would be something that we would consider. City Manager Brown said yes, we had a list of the residential and commercial customers that they could look at. Councilman Gurley asked if there was and expirations on the fire gear and what was the threshold of replacing the fire engine. Chief Prince said the fire engine was currently 8 1/2 and would put it at thirteen years old when we take delivery of the new one in 2029. He said the turnout gear has a maximum lifespan of ten years if it makes it that long. He said if he had to put an average on it, he would say about seven to eight years. Mayor Gainor asked if we would sell Engine 1 once we purchased a new engine or keep it in operation. Chief Prince said once we got to that point his suggestion was to sell Engine 3, rotate Engine 2 to our reserve engine for ISO purposes, and Engine 1 would rotate to our backup. Councilman Gurley asked if we were capturing all of the accurate amounts of all the meters. City Manager Brown said that we do currently perform audits, but it is always a concern if there is something getting through that you do not know about. Councilman Gurley wanted to make sure that we were not missing someone that was not paying all the way up to their bill. City Manager Brown said that we have three employees that focus on the meters all the time checking these types of things. Mayor Gainor said that he did want to add that he knew that some of our customers were on a fixed income but did not feel that this was a very drastic change, but asked as far as the water were we able to utilize an app so that customers could start monitoring their consumption. City Manager Brown said they do not, however he and the utilities department have met with three different companies attempting to obtain an app for this option. City Manager Brown wanted to also make sure everyone was clear on what an increase would be able to do for the city, he brought their attention to the service charge study. Councilman Douglas asked on the electrical meters, were we just increasing on the residential meters or were we doing it across the board, City Manager Brown replied it would be across the board. Councilman Gurley said that when we are increasing the rates of the citizens are we showing them this is in their best interest, because he did not want to see anything go up on his bill without knowing why. City Manager Brown said he felt that it was always important to explain why because a lot of people do not come to the meetings, but it is important for us to explain to them that the new nuclear plants have come online and MEAG, just like Georga Power have gone up, therefore if we do not do something still the customers and taxpayers have to fund it somehow and this is one way of doing so. He went on to say that he felt it was great that the Fire Department brought up the option of the water meters because they protect the property. Councilman Douglas stated that we may want to do a gradual increase so that it is not all at one time so that we can get to where we need to be. City Manager Brown asked that the council think over all of the information given so that we would have a good idea about the revenue forecast.

Consider DDA Proposed Resolution. City Manager Brown said that the City Attorney Lehman had proposed to increase the membership from seven to nine and would let him explain in more detail. Attorney Lehman said he had attended a meeting with the Downtown Development Authority and when they were thinking about nominating someone, they had actually had more than one person in mind and they liked the idea of expanding it to a larger board. He explained to them after looking at the by-laws that it would take the consent of the DDA and the council in order to do so. Therefore, they would like to expand the board from seven to nine and set a little more of a regimented procedure in how board members are selected and that is what the resolution does. Mayor Gainor said his personal opinion was that had this been the initial ask at the beginning it would have been looked upon differently. He said he did not think there had been a problem with the by-laws in the past years until now; now we are asking to change it from seven to nine, when seven has worked the entire time. Now at this meeting, asking for two additional and change the rules because it was unfavorable at the last meeting, he said in his opinion and he only voted in case there was a tie, that he felt the rules and by-laws have been fine this entire time. Councilman Renaud asked City Attorney Lehman what his opinion was on how things were handled at the last meeting. City Attorney Lehman said he preferred to go into Executive Session to discuss that because of the implications of what was done.

Motion to go into executive session at 6:37 pm was made by Councilman Gurley, seconded by Councilman Byrden, and unanimously approved by all Council Members.

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To meet with its attorney to discuss a pending or potential lawsuit, settlement, claim, administrative proceeding or other judicial action brought against or by the city, or any officer or employee of the city, or in which the city or any officer or employee may be directly involved; (O.C.G.A. § 50-14-2(1)).

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Motion to come out of executive session at 7: 38 pm was made by Councilman Douglas, seconded by Councilman Renaud, and unanimously approved by all Council Members.

As a result of the executive session a motion was made to increase the DDA Board from seven to nine members contingent on a new resolution being brought back before council by Councilman Byrden, seconded by Councilman Higdon, and unanimously approved by all Council Members.

REPORTS:

CONSIDER FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH 2024.

Motion to approve Financial Statements for the Month of March 2024 was made by Councilman Douglas, seconded by Councilman Byrden, and unanimously approved by all Council Members.

REPORTS FROM CITY MANAGER:

- The city is hiring lifeguards for the Summer at Holder Park Pool, applicants can see Autumn Waters in the HR Department.
- Customers will start seeing notifications on their utility bills about lead & copper testing. It will let them know they may see a blue flag beside their water meter that the water department will be putting out, please do not remove it and someone will be coming out to test the meter.

REPORTS FROM MAYOR AND COUNCIL:

- Councilman Byrden said that our committees and authorities must be more diverse. At the last meeting the council was misled, the Mainstreet Director said that the person had to be from the Zebulon and that no one from downtown was qualified to be on the DDA and so the decision was made based off that and now because the decision was not happy for everyone we have to come back and readjust by-laws. He went on to say since he had been on the DDA he had always supported it and been an advocate. When he started the DDA they only had a budget of \$10,000 and each year he continued to ask Chris to increase their budget. He said that he has always stood up for the DDA and been an advocate on their behalf. He then announced that he would be stepping down as the DDA Council Liaison and Mrs. Annette Higdon would be taking his place. He continued to say that there was more diversity that could be placed on the DDA Board than what we were having.
- Councilwoman Higdon said that she wanted to say something to the DDA board that was there about the decision that was made two weeks ago and stated that it was not done concerning race and that she did not deal in race, that she loved everyone and treated them fairly. She said it had to do with being diversified and what was right, but when they had Ms. Searcy come up and tell them not one lie but two, that changed everything. When we report something, it needs to be reported correctly so that everyone gets the full story and not pieces, but racist she was not and wanted everyone to know that because she had a higher power, and his name was Jesus and at the end of the day everyone else does too.
- Mayor Gainor presented a proclamation on behalf of Georgia Pines for the month of May, declaring it Mental Health Awareness Month.
- Mayor Gainor also asked City Manager Brown to check on debris on 1339 Lake Jenna Drive, 1st Street SW, and to check a major cut out in the road on 13th Avenue SW. He also asked about setting a date for an HR meeting concerning policy and procedures, retirement, and benefits. He suggested at the next meeting, we start it at 5:00 pm and City Manager Brown and HR Director present a report on the retirement, policy & procedures, and benefits, that way the council would be able to review it after the meeting. He went on to say he would then like to establish a policy committee and open it up to everyone.

ADJOURN: There being no further business, a motion was made at 7:50 pm by Councilman Douglas and seconded by Councilman Byrden, and unanimously approved by all Council Members. to adjourn the meeting.

APPROVED:

BOOKER T. GAINOR, IV

ATTEST:

DANA W. BARFIELD, CITY CLERK