

August 4, 2015

The regular meeting of the Pocomoke City Mayor and Council was held in the Council Chambers at City Hall on Monday, August 3, 2015. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 P.M.

Present: Mayor Bruce Morrison
Council Members: Diane Downing, George Tasker, Esther Troast,
Dale Trotter
Acting City Attorney: Chris Mason
Interim City Manager: Ernie Crofoot
Assistant City Clerk: Paula Sparrow

Review Minutes

In a motion (Tasker, Trotter passed) to approve the minutes of the July 13, 2015 meeting.

Review Bills

In a motion (Downing, Trotter passed) the bills presented to be paid. (Copy of bill list attached to original minutes).

Chamber of Commerce Request

The Mayor read a letter from the Chamber of Commerce requesting use of Cypress Park for the annual Pocomokeoberfest to be held on Saturday, September 26, 2015.

In a motion (Tasker, Trotter passed) use of the park on that date.

Councilman Trotter added the Chamber also be granted use of the City's tent for that event.

Golf Donation

The Mayor read a letter from the Holly Grove Christian School requesting a golf donation for their annual Fall Festival on Saturday, October 3, 2015.

In a motion (Troast, Downing passed) donation of one round of golf for four people for that event.

Use of City Lot

The Mayor read a letter of request from Pentecostal Church of God of Lincoln, Inc. for use of the City's lot located at 401 Fifth Street - parcel 1250 for a Community Fun Fair on Saturday, August 22, 2015.

Councilman Tasker asked if the City had insurance on the lot.

In a motion (Trotter, Troast passed) use of the lot on that date.

Pastor Ronnie White and Rev. James Jones

Mayor Morrison offered an apology for the last meeting I realized that the meeting got out of hand.

Both Pastor White and Rev. Jones accepted the apology.

The Mayor also wanted to apologize to the media. He stated that he made a judgment call at the last meeting on behalf of the citizens to ask the media to not come into the Council Chambers. He said that he felt it was a City issue and the taxpayers of Pocomoke needed to speak that night and they had more right to be in here than the news media. He said he felt the residents needed to speak first. He added that he was in trouble with the Attorney General's office now. He said it was nobody's decision but Mayor Bruce Morrison and not the Council's.

Pastor White stated, that as a representative of the Citizens Group for a Better Pocomoke, he will not ask for termination of the Mayor of Pocomoke City. He stated he felt the reputation of the City has to be preserved. Good citizenship and having a peaceful community was important. He stated their efforts was to have the truth revealed about the termination of Chief Sewell. This act has destabilized the community. They are here this evening to ask the Mayor and the town council to work with them to reinstate Kelvin Sewell as Chief of Police.

Mayor Morrison stated that as Mayor of Pocomoke City, in his opinion, he feels that with the litigation out there and everything that has been said that right now we cannot do that and bring Chief Sewell back. As the Mayor I am willing to work with you and I hope that all the people that have been coming will continue to come to the meetings. I hope that you will continue to support the town and council. We need to work together to make it a better town. This is my hope.

Pastor White agreed and said that he didn't want to lose sight of Chief Sewell.

Mayor Morrison stated he was looking to making a statement. His hands have been tied about making a statement because of the litigation. As you know, in the State law of Maryland when you are in litigation, you cannot comment. I have been told not to comment. The truth will come out one day. That man sitting right there, I love him. (Bishop Jenkins) I have respect for that man and he has worked 50 years to make Pocomoke City what is today - a better place for all of you. I do not appreciate someone saying I am a racist. I love every person in this room. As Mayor of this town, I feel we must move forward.

Pastor White said to let the D.O.J. (Department of Justice) with the lawsuits just play out. If things come out different, they come out different.

Rev. Jones stated that it was their feeling that if Chief Sewell was reinstated all these things would go away. We do not know what evidence you have that allows you to feel that he was not sufficient to do the job. We feel he has done so much for the community. He was terminated for doing a job that we see was substantially well. If you feel you have done something that was in error, change it. We withdrew our request for resignation of the City Mayor. Not because you said you weren't going to quit, but because we saw what damage was being done to our community, to our homes. The Friendliest Town on Shore is right now has been pulled so far apart that couldn't put it together with the most awesome glue. We need Jesus. Hopefully you received this today. (held up a letter) We received this from the Christ Congregation Church - addressed to Mayor Bruce Morrison and members of Pocomoke City. Rev. Jones read the letter expressing their concerns about the Chief's accomplishments during his five years. Chief Sewell's integrity makes him a positive role model for young people in your town and creates a positive image. Because the majority of the members of your city are white, *[Rev. Jones - "added that this is a misprint, because Pocomoke is predominately 60% African American, not us, but the City Council] and the only black member of the Council voted against Sewell's termination, there is at least the appearance of a racial component to the termination of Chief Sewell. As people of faith we stand shoulder to shoulder with our African-American brothers and sisters as they seek fairness, justice and transparency from their local government. We request that you reinstate Chief Sewell to his post at Chief of Pocomoke City Police Department, including compensation for any back pay that he may have lost during the interim period. Signed by Matthew Bradus.

His representative, Ms. Mary Pence, was introduced by Rev. Jones. Mayor Morrison stated she was not on the agenda tonight.

Mary Pence, a member of Christ Congregational Church in Silver Spring, MD, said she was an attorney, a mother, a grandmother, and a person of faith. She asked if Mayor Morrison received the letter. He stated he had not. She was one of seven members of her church who traveled here tonight. She stated the town had been in the Washington Post and New York Times. Ms. Pence added that the city may be in litigation and cannot talk about the case, but there is one thing you can do is "act" in reinstating Chief Sewell. She said she was hopeful that the healing in the community could begin and the people of Pocomoke can work together to restore the city's reputation.

Mayor Morrison thanked Mr. Jones and Mr. White for coming tonight.

Robert Cowger, Jr. addressed the Mayor and Council with a letter of support. Mr. Cowger said these gentlemen spoke very well tonight. Our town is in turmoil. I have lived here 57 years and I represented Pocomoke City as a Commissioner in two different terms. We have

never had this kind of problem. We have been the "Friendliest town on the Eastern Shore", and I think everybody appreciates that. As you said, Reverend Jenkins spent his whole life making sure that the minorities and the whites were together and we had a good town. I feel like I needed to get out and do something because of the turmoil that was going on. I have been an elected official and had to make a lot of hard decisions. I put a letter out to the community asking for their support. I have a total of almost 300 signatures here. These signatures in no way represents that they support the firing or the rehiring of the Chief. He read the letter and left the signatures with the Mayor. The letter stated that they were aware that many details of the situation are barred by law from being released to the public, but remain confident that the actions and decisions of the Mayor and Council are in the best interests of the entire Pocomoke City community.

Councilwoman Downing stated she supports Chief Sewell. I believe he has done a fantastic job and I feel that he should be reinstated.

Reverend Jones asked Mayor Morrison if there was an advertised ad for Chief of Police. Mayor Morrison said there was.

Rev. Jones asked if we were ready to hire somebody when this was not even over. Pastor White said he would like to know that because we know there is litigation out there with the DOJ, the EEOC. Are you going to hire someone?

Mayor Morrison stated that the litigation should be finished shortly. He stated he wanted to share what is going on.

Pastor White said that is what is going to cause a lot of conflict. There will never be no togetherness if we just hire somebody and the litigation has not been settled yet. If it is settled in his favor, then we look to you to hire him back. But if you fill the position, how are you going to hire him back? He asked if advertising for the chief position was legal. Mayor Morrison said he would check on that and would call Mr. White or Mr. Jones tomorrow. Councilwoman Downing said, why advertise then?

Rev. Jones said that the interim period is almost finished - our State Police Lt. Starner. Mayor Morrison replied he will stay as long as we need him.

Rev. Jones said that he was supposed to stay 60 days. Mayor Morrison said he hoped it would be resolved in 60 days.

Mayor Morrison stated what he wanted to see a lot of people start coming to the council meeting. Many nights I sit up here and there is nobody sitting in the audience.

Rev. Jones said that the community has a feeling of separation. You have accepted a petition in support of ...

Mayor Morrison said no, he had no petition in support. It was a letter of support, not a legal document. There were signatures on it.

Rev. Jones asked if (their) petition had been reviewed. Mayor Morrison said it had and he had looked at the signatures on it.

Rev. Jones said a lot of them have not been black. It is more than just the black community that is supporting Chief Sewell. Please give this man his job back so that we can get back to being comfortable in our community.

A (woman in the audience that did not introduce herself) asked if we could meet elsewhere. People that supports both sides could all come in comfortably, no matter what side you supported, and hear.

Public Comments

Mayor Morrison said the comments made tonight are very meaningful.

Vanessa Jones introduced herself. She said she only had one question and they have not had an answer to this one question. Was Chief Sewell incompetent? Why was he fired? We keep getting a personnel issue. That is not satisfying the people. I feel I need to know the real reason the man was fired. She said crime was down in the last 4 1/2 years.

Mayor Morrison said he just got the stats for the last five years and crime is on the rise.

Ms. Jones asked again, why was Chief Sewell terminated? We need to know.

Mayor Morrison said he could not comment by Maryland Law. Maryland Law says that while we are under litigation I cannot comment - none of us can.

Shelia Nelson said that on social media she read that a person stated he had lost respect for him. How did this gentleman know what Chief Sewell did?

Mayor Morrison responded that there was a lot on social media being said.

The woman said that if you all feel like Chief Sewell acted immorally, like he told lies, or he was on the phone talking to someone, that's nothing. Who doesn't have a little dirt? We all have something. As far as him being positive, no matter what he has said being a police officer, making the streets are safe. Like I said, if he has done something underneath the covers or something, that is his business. That is his business. I don't think he has done that either. But what I am saying is that this man has done nothing but good. Those of you who have said that he did something that is totally unshameful and disrespectful, how many have us here have done it before?

Connie Parks said that her son said he was called (the n-word) and nobody likes that ugly word. When he complained he had to come back here to work and he felt like he worked in a hostile workplace. Who wouldn't? Being called (the n-word) on the job and a police officer. Then he came here and then I don't know who called himself pulling Chief Sewell's chain, or jerking him around, wanted Chief Sewell to fire my son Frank and fire Lt. Green. That's what happened. That's why Chief Sewell That's the personnel issue that they are talking about.

_____, unknown woman in audience, said Chief Sewell was the first chief I have ever had the pleasure of meeting because every other chief that I had stayed in the office. Since chief has been here our officers[inaud.]

Connie Parks asked if she could say one more thing? When my son came back to Pocomoke he was demoted from Detective to a street cop and now he is in the office straightening up file cabinets.[inaud.]

Mayor Morrison asked for a motion to adjourn.

Pastor Kathleen Moore, of the Miracle Deliverance Church, addressed the Mayor and Council. She said she wanted to go another avenue. She said that Rev. Tasker had come to her church. She said she could not see that as a man of God because he has to speak truth. We need you to speak to us and tell us what we have asked.

Councilman Tasker said that he has prayed at her church many times. He said, Lord let there be when things come about there will a time when we or you can straighten it out. I prayed for a couple weeks so I could make the right decision about Chief Sewell. I fasted, and I prayed, and I had my church praying about it. This is what I had to do, and it has nothing to do with race, color, it has nothing to do with that, it is to do with that we cannot talk about it. I would love to tell someone about it and get it off my mind. He was a good man, there is no doubt about it. He and I were friends, but the morning I had to do it I said I had to put friendship aside because I had do what the people of Pocomoke[inaud.]

Mayor Morrison tried to regain order with his gavel.

Pastor White said to say the people, don't say us because us[inaud.]

Mayor Morrison tried to regain order with his gavel.

Councilman Tasker said I wrote down here how many times you said "you all" and not African American. Last month you jumped all over me because I said those things. You said it at least a dozen times. [inaud.]

Mayor Morrison tried to regain order with his gavel.

Mayor Morrison asked that everyone allow Pastor Moore to speak.

Pastor Moore said that she feels that by being God's chosen that even though you might not hear what you want to hear, I look to you to stand up and as a man of God you have not spoken to us.

Councilman Tasker said he loved this community and I came here 25 years ago, started out with nothing and worked my heart off for this community. I feed everybody in this town, I help feed everybody. You don't see the money I put in personally out of my pocket to help this town out. I have done all kinds of stuff because I love this town.

Pastor Moore said that she wants him to speak as a leader, God's leader.

Councilman Tasker said that he did what he had to do with the facts. I am not revealing [inaud.]

Mayor Morrison tried to regain order with his gavel.

Councilwoman Downing said you saw something that I didn't see. [inaud.]

Mayor Morrison asked for a motion to adjourn. [inaud.]

Mayor Morrison said we are not getting into a shouting match. The two gentlemen that came here tonight on the agenda have spoke clearly and very well tonight to the Council and the Mayor. I am not going to let this thing get out of control.

Mayor Morrison acknowledged a woman in the audience who wanted to speak. [inaud.]

There being no further business a motion was made by Councilman Tasker and seconded by Councilman Trotter to adjourn at 8:35 P.M.

Approved: _____ 2015

Paula Sparrow
Assistant City Clerk

Additions to the minutes made by Councilwoman Downing in an email 09-06-15 at 7:39 PM.

