

August 6, 2018

The regular meeting of the Pocomoke City Mayor and Council was held in the Council Chambers at City Hall on Monday, August 6, 2018. The meeting was called to order at 6:31 P.M.

Present: Mayor Morrison  
Council Members: Todd Nock, Dale Trotter, Diane Downing, George Tasker, Esther Troast  
City Manager Robert L. Cowger, Jr.  
City Attorney Roscoe Leslie  
Deputy Clerk Paula Sparrow

#### Approval of minutes

In a motion (Trotter, Downing) passed - to table the minutes of the July 23, 2018 meeting due to numerous corrections.

#### Approval of bills

In a motion (Nock, Trotter) passed – to pay bills presented.

#### Special Sunday Liquor Permit

The American Legion Post 93 requests a Special Sunday Liquor Permit for their District Meeting to be held on October 28, 2018. A question was asked about the hours requested as it was not stated on the permit.

In a motion (Tasker, Trotter) to allow the permit. Councilman Trotter added his motion depended on the hours of operation. Councilman Tasker said he understood it was an afternoon meeting but he did not know the exact hours. Roll call vote: Tasker, aye; Downing, aye; Troast, aye; Trotter, aye; Nock, nay. Vice President Troast said to note that that the vote was 4 to 1.

#### 2019 Circuit Rider Grant Agreement

City Manager Cowger stated this was a renewal for another two-year period. Vice President Troast read a letter from the State regarding the award of the Circuit Rider program in the amount of \$95,000. It will provide a part-time employee at no-cost to the City for an additional two-year period. The program shares the employee 50/50 with Crisfield.

In a motion (Tasker, Trotter passed) for Vice President Troast to sign the grant agreement.

### Codification Services

Planning Director Dan Brandewie explained that this was a proposal from General Code for codification services to bring the City Code up-to-date. It is a budgeted item. The proposal includes an online and printed version. Attorney Leslie added that General Code does an excellent job and does it for hundreds of towns. Councilwoman Downing said the company does it for Worcester County.

In a motion (Downing, Troast passed) to approve the purchase of services from General Code per their proposal.

### Unsafe Buildings

Presented was a listing of 18 properties, along with photographs, nominated as unsafe buildings with demolition/repair requested under Chapter 107 of the Code. Planning Director Brandewie explained the process and timeline. Some of the owners have approached the City asking for assistance with demolition. This is a separate listing from the properties discussed at previous meetings. The prior listing has a September 23 deadline for response from the owner(s),

### Submission of Grant Applications

There are three grant applications being submitted. The first is a U.S.D.A. application for vehicles and equipment. City Manager Cowger said the grant applications will be becoming available. The City's Public Works and Water/Wastewater Department vehicles are outdated. Their equipment needs to be upgraded, as well.

Mr. Brandewie addressed the second grant application through D.N.R. Community Parks and Playgrounds. Last year the City applied for this grant for Cypress Park for several projects and was declined. However, this year we are recommending restroom improvements in the amount of \$162,000; tennis court upgrades in the amount of approximately \$74,000; and the purchase of playground equipment in the amount of about \$130,000. Mr. Cowger said that he has been approached by someone whose deceased wife's estate provides funds for a playground in Pocomoke City and the City could use those funds as matching funds.

Councilman Nock said the basketball courts on Short Street look horrible. We need to put our attention on this end of town. It is not fair to always be doing work at Cypress Park. We need to build another park on the other end of town. We could use property the City owns. It was added that the Worcester County Board of Education owns the basketball courts that was referenced.

Mr. Cowger addressed the D.N.R. Waterway Grant for a marina. He said the City has passed three hurdles and there is one final one. After which, we can move forward with the building of the marina. The application deadline is August 20.

In a motion (Trotter, Troast passed) to approve submittal of these three grant applications.

#### Mayor and Council Items:

Councilman Tasker said that tomorrow evening is National Night Out at Cypress Park from 6 – 8 pm. There will be free food, entertainment, games and prizes for the children.

Councilman Trotter asked if Hughes Net is franchised within the City. Mr. Cowger said they are not at the present time. Councilman Tasker said he had not had good reports on them from Captain's Cove residents and it is expensive. Councilman Trotter said there are a lot of scammers out there and wanted to make sure the City was protected.

Councilman Nock had a question for the five of you (meaning Mayor and Council) concerning the letter sent Mayor Morrison and the WBOC article. He asked if they would like to tell the truth or should he. He has been bashed on Facebook and people spreading things about him that were not true. We have a Chamber full of people today and they came to hear the truth. Attorney Leslie said the Council talked in closed session about a personnel matter. If you want to release the minutes on that, I think you need to vote as a body on that. Councilman Nock said it wasn't about the closed session. It was about the letter which all five of us signed, not two. It was not right that the three of you have sat around and allowed people to say we are the only two to ask him to resign. We did not call for him to resign. The truth of the matter is it was George and Esther that talked to WBOC. When they called me, I declined to comment. There was an exchange of comments. Councilman Tasker said he did speak to the press. The letter did not ask the Mayor to resign. It was an opportunity to retire with several benefits. The Mayor did not want to retire. Councilwoman Troast said she did talk to the press. Councilwoman Downing said she did not speak to the press. It was agreed that all five councilmembers signed the letter. Councilwoman Troast said she would continue to be the Mayor's voice and would continue to do so through December. At that time, the Council would have a letter from the Mayor's doctor with an evaluation. By then they should know what the future will hold for him. Councilwoman Troast said he cannot speak but she can communicate with him. Councilwoman Downing asked are we going to release the minutes. She said everything is out there. She added that she and Councilman Nock were the last to come in and sign the letter and everyone's signatures were on there. Jamie, the Mayor's son-in-law, said he believed we are getting really close to getting outside the HIPPA laws. Councilwoman Downing said it was already out there in the public. Councilman Nock said you (Jamie) discussed it on WBOC. Councilman Tasker said he was in Garrett County at the time WBOC called him. The newsperson asked him if he was for (or against) the Mayor staying. He responded that he was for the Mayor staying. After the story had aired, Councilman Nock called WBOC and spoke to Caroline Cole to set the record straight that all five had signed the letter and all five agreed for him to retire.

William Sparrow, 1955 Orchard Drive, suggested a solution. The City could issue the letter of the meeting and make it transparent to the residents of what the letter entailed. That would set the record straight.

Ronnie White, 804 Walnut Street, asked if the Mayor's son-in-law was a councilmember and why he was in a closed meeting. Attorney Leslie stated the Council can invite people in a closed meeting. Councilman Nock said he was not invited by the Council as a special guest, he just showed up. City Manager Cowger said he asked the Council if he could speak for the Mayor. Councilwoman Troast said he brought a letter from the Mayor asking him to speak for him. Mr. White asked that a man in his condition, with all the stress, who would push him to stay in this position and cause more stress. Councilman Trotter said that stress the Mayor was under is why we offered him retirement. That way he could devote 100% to recovery. Councilwoman Downing said Bruce, Laura, Jamie, and whoever else probably took it personal and were offended, and it was not presented personal – it was just business. Councilman Trotter said it was a closed session and it should have remained closed. Councilwoman Downing agreed. If it had been, we would be moving forward right now. Councilman Nock said it had nothing to do with him (Jamie) being in the closed meeting. The Council did not want to stand behind the letter and their decision.

Rev. James Jones, 1851 Cypress Road, said that each of you know your responsibilities and asked if the Council is concerned about the welfare of the City of Pocomoke and its citizens, and the growth of the City, or are we concerned about hurting the feelings of a friend and a person we have respect for. If he cannot effectively do the job, then think about the welfare of Pocomoke City, its citizen, its businesses, and its growth - and Council, make a decision.

Deborah Graves, 222 Laurel Street, said this has been the most awkward meeting she has ever been to. The Council says one thing and then does another. You all signed the petition to have him step down. He cannot speak. The things the Mayor has to do he can't do and you are paying him all these months when he has been given a chance when he can't do anything. Do the right thing, and stick to your word.

Thelma Arion, 3103 Lankford Highway, New Church, VA, said not to judge because he can't speak. Councilman Nock said everybody gave him accolades that night and told him of the job that he had done. But this is a position where he must be able to effectively speak. He goes to meetings and we do not know what is said at those meetings. His job is to speak. When he speaks, he will be effectively be the Mayor of Pocomoke.

Mr. Brown, Vice-Commander of the American Legion Post 93, wanted the Council to know we have new officers and we are doing what we are supposed to do and do it the right way.

There being no further business, in a motion (Tasker, Trotter) the meeting adjourned at 7:22 P.M.

Approved:

Paula M. Sparrow  
Deputy Clerk