

REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING, TUESDAY, MAY 5, 2015 AT 9:00 A.M.

Meeting called to order by Council President Markham.

Present: Thomas, Markham, Henson, Houston, Hammon.

Absent: None.

The meeting was opened with prayer by Pastor Gary Houston and followed by the pledge to the flag.

Motion was made by Councilman Thomas duly seconded by Councilwoman Henson and unanimously passed by the Council to confirm the agenda for this meeting with an amendment to: add an executive session regarding economic development and a personnel matter; add as R-9 a venue use agreement for use of Q.V. Sykes Park.

Motion was made by Councilwoman Henson duly seconded by Councilwoman Houston and unanimously passed by the Council to approve the minutes dated April 16, 2015 and April 21, 2015.

The following proclamations were approved to be issued by the Mayor:

May 17-23, 2015 – “National Public Works Week”

May 10-16, 2015 – “Police Week”

May 15, 2015 – “Peace Officers Memorial Day”

Councilwoman Henson offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Order:

ORDER #15858 ORDER AUTHORIZING INSTALLATION OF STREET LIGHTS AT:
37TH STREET BETWEEN STATE BOULEVARD AND 58TH AVENUE;
5TH STREET & 57TH AVENUE; AND 5TH STREET & 58TH AVENUE

And, Councilwoman Houston seconded the motion, whereupon said Order was discussed, passed and adopted by the Council by a vote as follows:

Yea: Thomas, Markham, Henson, Houston, Hammon.

Nay: None.

Councilwoman Henson offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Resolution:
RESO. #5963 RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING A CONTRIBUTION FROM THE CITY OF
MERIDIAN TO THE JUNETEENTH HERITAGE FESTIVAL COMMITTEE
FOR THE JUNETEENTH FESTIVAL ON JUNE 20, 2015

And, Councilwoman Houston seconded the motion, whereupon said Resolution was discussed, passed and adopted by the Council by a vote as follows:

Yea: Thomas, Markham, Henson, Houston, Hammon.

Nay: None.

At this time, discussion was held regarding the proposed ordinance to revise certain polling places in the city. Richie McAlister appeared and stated the Mayor and administration feel that due diligence in the time and preparation and study of this particular item has not been performed and they would like the Council to hold off on this. Councilman Thomas stated he did not agree. Due diligence has been done. This has been discussed in a work session and two Council of Government meetings where all elected officials are invited. This has been discussed in public and in two Board of Supervisor's meetings. This has not been done behind closed doors and it is not a last minute thing. It has been discussed for months. The election commissioners are the professionals and conduct the elections. The city has asked them to conduct city elections. There is no dilution of vote. They vote in the same ward they did before. What they have done is try to make it more convenient, safer places to park and easier access. Mr. McAlister stated they asked about an analysis, a comprehensive review and a poll of all people affected and they weren't able to produce any of that. They asked for a copy of the minutes from where it was discussed in open forum so they could all see the reasons and the people's concerns about parking and polling places. Councilman Thomas asked if he asked the election commission for this information. Mr. McAlister said he spoke with Jeff and he was told there were not any minutes available. Council President Markham stated he appreciated Mr. McAlister's opinion. This was discussed at the March 31st work session and instead of putting it on the agenda for the first meeting in April he held off a month to give the administration the time to meet with Mr. Tate and the election commissioners regarding any of their concerns. The five (5) Council members were all on board with this at the work session and they are all still on board with it now. Mayor Bland appeared and stated that what is important here is the fact that there is a reason why you have the Department of Justice coming in all 16 of our voting sites during elections. There is a history of distrust as it relates to voting election irregularities in the City of Meridian and in Lauderdale County. There is a reason why the school district has been under consent orders from 1955 that we are still not lifted from. There is a reason why pretty soon he will be signing off on another consent decree with the Meridian Police Department because policies and practices have been in place that create distrust. When you have a situation where we are changing four or five polling locations not long after we have gotten clearance from the DOJ, it sends the wrong message. We have 16 voting sites and he is sure that are a lot of people at those voting sites who would rather vote somewhere else. Even Councilwoman Houston's ward, there is easier access for people to vote at Freedom Rock. We could make those changes if we have 100 people who want to do that but we don't. There is a reason why we are under all these consent decrees. There is a reason why the DOJ was at all 16 voting locations this past election. There is a fundamental problem with changing voting a site from New Hope Baptist Church to First Baptist Church. There is such a thing as history. There is such a thing as voter confusion and there is such a thing as a dilute of black vote. When you change from New Hope Baptist Church to First Baptist Church there will be confusion. You are creating an environment of distrust. There is a reason why we are still paying so much debt in this city. It is because of the decisions, policies and practices of people who have been sitting up there on that Council for years. They are asking the Council to give them time to fully review this. They just had a historic election. The DOJ just gave the city pre-clearance authority. That was very important. It is just as important for them to take time to make these decisions. He stated that Mt. Olive Baptist Church will be a voting site for city elections. He has already concluded with the pastor and deacons that this will be a voting place. He has asked them to give him time to deal with this. They

don't' need to take this off the roll. He told the Council if they vote for this that he will veto it and if they over-ride it that it may be taken to court. He wants the Council to give them time for a study to be done. He said he stands behind what he sent them last Friday and asked that this not go further and to think about the message they are sending. Councilman Thomas stated it was not a republican issue and not a democratic issue. It is not a black issue or a white issue. It is a way to make it easier for the people of the City of Meridian to vote. This will also save the city some money down the road. This discussion was stopped at this time because of a schedule public hearing.

The hour of 9:15 a.m. having arrived, the hearing regarding unclean property located at 2909 19th Street was opened with motion by Councilman Thomas duly seconded by Councilwoman Houston and unanimously passed by the Council. Inspector Rayford Wright appeared and stated that Mr. Cole has made an effort to clean the property. He passed out before and after pictures for the Council to see what he has done already. He asked that the Council waive the penalty and cleanup cost. Councilman Markham asked how much he has taken care of. Mr. Wright said he has about 90% of it cleaned. Councilman Hammon stated this has been going on for years and it has been a legal battle. This man keeps going back to his consistent habit. Mr. Wright asked that the penalty be waived. Councilman Hammon stated that this was the law and it needs to be cleaned. When it is cleaned up he goes back to the same thing. This needs to be handled now. Councilman Markham said the resident of this property is not the owner of the property. The owner is unable to take care of this matter because of health issues. Mr. Cole stated that his mother got down and he is working a part time job. This is another income to put food and pay for lights and water. Councilman Thomas asked Mr. Cole if he could get this cleaned up in two weeks. Mr. Cole said he could not. Mr. Wright said he still has a considerable amount to be removed. Councilwoman Houston asked him what his plan is to get this done. Mr. Cole said it would take six months to get it done. He is only working a few days a week and has something else going on. Councilman Hammon asked him how long it took him to collect this junk. Mr. Cole said he has been doing this for a number of years. Councilwoman Houston asked him if he sold the items. Mr. Cole said he did. Mr. Wright's recommendation is that he be give three weeks to get it done and if it is not done by that time that he be charged the cost of cleaning and the penalty. Councilman Hammon recommended that the code be followed. The neighbors in this area have had to deal with this for three years. He does not agree to giving him more time. Councilwoman Houston said in looking at the pictures the does look like he has made some progress. She said she would be willing to give him three weeks. Motion was made by Councilman Thomas duly seconded by Councilwoman

Henson and unanimously passed by the Council to close the hearing. Councilwoman Houston offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Resolution:

RESO. #5964 RESOLUTION ADJUDICATING PARCEL OF LAND TO BE A MENACE
TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY OF THE COMMUNITY
(RAGSDALE SUR BLOCK 134 47' N&S X 47' E&W BEG 100' E NWC;
2909 19TH STREET)

And, Councilman Markham seconded the motion, whereupon said Resolution was discussed, passed and adopted by the Council by a vote as follows:

Yea: Markham, Henson, Houston.

Nay: Thomas, Hammon.

Discussion regarding the ordinance to revise certain polling places continued. Election Commissioner Jeff Tate appeared and stated he was just given a letter that was sent to the City Council regarding this. He wanted to correct some of the statements made in the second paragraph of that letter. The letter states that the election commission's decision was not made in open forum nor were any minutes recorded. This is false. He was never asked for any minutes. He said he would be more than happy to provide these. This is something they have been working on for months and months now. It states that there was no study, data or comparison done. He said he went door to door from Oak Grove Drive to Sweetgum Bottom Road and out in the Southeast area to talk to people. He said the letter said there was hollow reasoning for this. He said this would save the city money if done now. The letter said this was done behind closed doors and this is not true. This was discussed with the Council and administration at a work session, discussed at Board of Supervisor meetings, Council of Government meetings and they even had public hearing. No one showed up to voice their concerns at these public hearings. They are just asking if the city wants to do the same thing that the county has done. It is impossible to get the city ward lines and the county ward lines lined up perfectly. However, the changes that they have made in the county can be mirrored in some of the city wards if the city adopts these changes. He said this is the City Council's decision to make and he asked them to do this. Councilwoman Houston said it was stated that Mt. Olive was on board. She said that some of them have begged them to let voting take place there again. She said they heard after her election that they shut down that voting precinct. She asked at what point they decided to come back in. Mr. Tate said this was news to him. Councilwoman Houston said they were adamant that they did not want voting there. Mr. Tate said he and Ms. Dancy went there and met with the board. Basically, at that time they were under the DOJ and did not have enough time to make the necessary changes for DOJ clearance and the church said that was OK but it was the last time. It is their facility and they can do whatever they want to. They have moved on from that. The last thing everyone needs to do is go back to a location which may be iffy and they ask them not to return again. They have found locations that better serve the voters. Councilwoman Houston asked Mr. Tate if they had looked at Freedom Rock. Mr. Tate said they did but that Freedom Rock does not have an adequate room with the needed electricity and room for the equipment needed. Councilwoman Houston asked if regardless of what the city does, will the county make these decisions. Mr. Tate stated that the Board of Supervisors has already made these decisions. Councilwoman Houston asked if this is where the people were going to vote in the upcoming elections. Mr. Tate said yes. Councilwoman Houston stated that at the work session it was her impression this is not something the city has to do but something that would help to keep down voter confusion. She said when she was running she heard people getting confused about where to go to vote. Some even went to one place and were told they had to go to another place and decided not to go and vote. She feels this is something that can be good for the community. She asked if the county has already approved with or without the city's blessing. Mr. Tate said these are changes that they had to make. Councilwoman Henson said in the 1960's she spent eight years as an election commissioner and this was always done by the county. She said she supports this. Councilman Markham asked if closing Velma Young was in their proposal as was stated. Mr. Tate said that it is not proposed to close Velma Young and it has never been considered. Also, Velma Young is not going to be closed to move to a church across the street. Councilman Markham stated that those votes who live on Will Wright Road, Sweetgum bottom Road and Bonita Drive will have the ease of voting in their neighborhood and not have to drive across town to vote. He said the only changes to Ward 2 and moving from Trinity Church to the Meridian Little Theater and splitting the Velma Young polling place with some going to Oak Grove Baptist Church. He said that if anything else is said that it would be false. Councilman Thomas stated that Lauderdale County has a history of clean elections. He said he didn't remember any impropriety in the past. He asked Mr. Tate if he remembers the DOJ coming in and saying there were any improprieties in the county. Mr. Tate said no. He said after these elections there are certifications for the city and county. No one shows up at these. Councilman Markham asked the other election commissioners with Mr. Tate were on board for this. They all said yes. He asked the Circuit Clerk if she was on

board with this and she said yes. He said this will mirror what Lauderdale County has already adopted and will help stop some confusion. Councilman Hammon said he was ready to vote. Councilwoman Houston asked what other effort besides the mailings they would utilize to make sure the communities at large know about these changes. Mr. Tate said that when there are voting changes that Lauderdale County does their best to find volunteers or pay people to stay at the old precinct and redirect voters to the new precincts. Also, they utilize the media to get the word out. Councilwoman Houston said that we have a responsibility to show up. She said we can rant and rave about these changes but if you don't show up and vote you will go forever un-noticed. Everyone needs to vote regardless of where the polling place is. Just go vote. After discuss, Councilman Thomas offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Ordinance:

ORDIN. #4457 AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ARTICLE I, CHAPTER 8, OF THE
CODE OF ORDINANCES OF THE CITY OF MERIDIAN, MS, TO
REVISE CERTAIN POLLING PLACES

And, Councilwoman Henson seconded the motion, whereupon said Ordinance was discussed, passed and adopted by the Council by a vote as follows:

Yea: Thomas, Markham, Henson, Houston, Hammon.
Nay: None.

Councilman Thomas offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Resolution:
RESO. #5965 RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI (THE "CITY")
DETERMINING THE NECESSITY FOR AMENDING THE AMENDED AND
RESTATED TAX INCREMENT FINANCING PLAN OF 2006 (MERIDIAN
CROSSROADS PROJECT); PROVIDING THAT A PUBLIC HEARING BE
CONDUCTED IN CONNECTION WITH THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT;
PROVIDING FOR PUBLICATION OF NOTICE OF SAID PUBLIC HEARING;
AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES

And, Councilwoman Henson seconded the motion, whereupon said Resolution was discussed, passed and adopted by the Council by a vote as follows:

Yea: Thomas, Markham, Henson, Houston, Hammon.
Nay: None.

Councilwoman Houston offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Order:

ORDER #15859 ORDER AUTHORIZING SUBMISSION OF GRANT REQUEST FOR
\$6,000.00 FROM THE CHARLES YOUNG FOUNDATION
(TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES AT VELMA YOUNG CENTER)

And, Councilwoman Henson seconded the motion, whereupon said Order was discussed, passed and adopted by the Council by a vote as follows:

Yea: Thomas, Markham, Henson, Houston, Hammon.
Nay: None.

Councilwoman Houston offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Order:

ORDER #15860 ORDER AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF VENUE USE AGREEMENT
BETWEEN THE CITY OF MERIDIAN AND THE MERIDIAN ATHLETIC
ASSOCIATION (SUNFISH TRIATHLON)

And, Councilwoman Henson seconded the motion, whereupon said Order was discussed, passed and adopted by the Council by a vote as follows:

Yea: Thomas, Markham, Henson, Houston, Hammon.
Nay: None.

Councilman Hammon offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Resolution:

RESO. #5966 RESOLUTION OF THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF
MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI GRANTING EXEMPTION FROM AD VALOREM
TAXES FOR AN ADDITIONAL FIVE-YEAR PERIOD TO VAN ZYVERDEN,
INC. AS AUTHORIZED BY SECTION 27-31-101 ET SEQ., OF THE
MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, AS AMENDED (2009 ADDITIONS)

And, Councilwoman Henson seconded the motion, whereupon said Resolution was discussed, passed and adopted by the Council by a vote as follows:

Yea: Thomas, Markham, Henson, Houston, Hammon.
Nay: None.

Councilman Hammon offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Resolution:

RESO. #5967 RESOLUTION OF THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF
MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI GRANTING EXEMPTION FROM AD VALOREM
TAXES FOR AN ADDITIONAL FIVE-YEAR PERIOD TO VAN ZYVERDEN,
INC. AS AUTHORIZED BY SECTION 27-31-101 ET SEQ., OF THE
MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, AS AMENDED (2010 ADDITIONS)

And, Councilwoman Henson seconded the motion, whereupon said Resolution was discussed, passed and adopted by the Council by a vote as follows:

Yea: Thomas, Markham, Henson, Houston, Hammon.
Nay: None.

Councilman Thomas offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Order:

ORDER #15861 ORDER AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF STANDBY GENERATOR
INDUSTRIAL MAINTENANCE SERVICE AGREEMENT BETWEEN
TAYLOR POWER SYSTEM, RICHLAND, MS AND THE CITY OF MERIDIAN

And, Councilwoman Houston seconded the motion, whereupon said Order was discussed, passed and adopted by the Council by a vote as follows:

Yea: Thomas, Markham, Henson, Houston, Hammon.

Nay: None.

Councilwoman Houston offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Order:

ORDER #15862 ORDER ACCEPTING THE BID FOR EMERGENCY GENERATOR
INSTALLATION (EAST MERIDIAN WASTEWATER PLANT) FROM
THE SERVICE COMPANY, MERIDIAN, MS, IN THE AMOUNT OF
\$30,000.00 AND AUTHORIZING EXECUTION OF CONTRACT
FOR SAID WORK

And, Councilwoman Henson seconded the motion, whereupon said Order was discussed, passed and adopted by the Council by a vote as follows:

Yea: Thomas, Markham, Henson, Houston, Hammon.

Nay: None.

Motion was made by Councilwoman Houston duly seconded by Councilwoman Henson and passed by a majority vote of the Council to approve the claims docket dated April 30, 2015 in the amount of \$1,891,917.43. Voting yea: Markham, Henson, Houston, Hammon. Voting nay: Thomas.

Councilwoman Houston offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Order:

ORDER #15863 ORDER AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF VENUE USE AGREEMENT
BETWEEN THE CITY OF MERIDIAN AND THE URBAN WORLD
ENTERTAINMENT GROUP (SOUTHERN SOUL MUSIC CONCERT TO
BENEFIT THE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB OF EAST MISSISSIPPI AT
Q.V. SYKES PARK ON JUNE 13, 2015)

And, Councilman Thomas seconded the motion, whereupon said Order was discussed, passed and adopted by the Council by a vote as follows:

Yea: Thomas, Markham, Henson, Houston, Hammon.
Nay: None.

President Markham advised of the notification of legal advertisement for the following: a) asbestos abatement & demolition – 43 houses; b) vertical turbine pumps.

President Markham called on Mayor Bland for his report. H brought up Coach Cole and Michelle Davis to congratulate them and their women’s basketball team. He stated that Karen Rooney with Main Street thanked the city for helping with Earth’s Bounty. He thanked everyone for helping with the Jimmy Rodgers Festival and the race this past weekend. He presented a proclamation for “Older Americans Month” to members of the Lauderdale County Council on Aging.

President Markham called for Council comments. Various comments were made.

An executive session was requested regarding economic development and a personnel matter. Motion was made by Councilwoman Houston duly seconded by Councilwoman Henson and unanimously passed by the Council to close the meeting to determine whether to declare an executive session. Motion was made by Councilman Thomas duly seconded by Councilwoman Houston and unanimously passed by the Council to declare an executive session in order to discuss economic development and a personnel matter. The Council then went into executive session. Motion was made by Councilwoman Houston duly seconded by Councilwoman Henson and unanimously passed by Council to go out of executive session.

President Markham called the regular meeting back to order. No action was taken regarding the executive session.

There being no further business to come before the Council at this time, the meeting was adjourned. Sine die.

Respectfully submitted,

Pam McInnis, Clerk of Council