REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2017 AT 9:00 A.M.

Meeting called to order by Council President Houston.

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

Absent: None.

The meeting was opened with prayer by Pastor Odell Hopson, of West Mt. Moriah Baptist Church 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 with the possibility of an Executive Session for economic development, potential litigation with possible action to follow.

Motion was made by Councilman Markham duly seconded by Councilman Thomas and unanimously passed by the Council to approve the minutes dated January 17, 2017.

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

RESO. #6093  RESOLUTION APPOINTING DEPUTY CLERKS OF THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

And, Councilman Thomas 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 Markham offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Resolution:

RESO. #6094  RESOLUTION DECLARING CERTAIN MUNICIPALLY OWNED REAL PROPERTY TO BE SURPLUS AND NOT NEEDED FOR MUNICIPAL PURPOSES AND AUTHORIZED TO BE SOLD AT FAIR MARKET VALUE

And, Councilman Thomas seconded the motion, whereupon said Resolution was discussed, passed and adopted by the Council by a vote as follows:
Councilman Thomas offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Order:

ORDER #16280 ORDR AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF CHANGE ORDER
NO. 1 BETWEEN HEMPHILL CONSTRUCTION CO. AND THE
CITY OF MERIDIAN (WWTP PROCESS MECHANICAL AND
ELECTRICAL UPGRADES)

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

ORDER #16281 ORDR AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF MEMORANDUM
OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE CITY OF MERIDIAN
AND THE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS OF EAST MISSISSIPPI
(BRINGING H.O.P.E.)

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

ORDER #16282 ORDR AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF MEMORANDUM
OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE CITY OF MERIDIAN
AND THE MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY/
MISSISSIPPI OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY

And, Councilwoman Henson seconded the motion, whereupon said Order was discussed, passed
and adopted by the Council by a vote as follows:
Councilman Thomas offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Order:

ORDER #16283 ORDER AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF MEMORANDUM
OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE CITY OF MERIDIAN
AND IT’S GOVERNING AUTHORITIES AND THE MISSISSIPPI
BAND OF CHOCTAW INDIANS

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

ORDER #16284 ORDER AUTHORIZING AGREEMENT BETWEEN LEADING
EDGES, LLC AND THE CITY OF MERIDIAN (ANNUAL REPORT)

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 Markham offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Order:

ORDER #16285 ORDER AUTHORIZING EXECUTION OF AN ARCHITECT
SERVICES AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE CITY OF
MERIDIAN AND ARCHER ARCHITECTURE (MUSEUM
ROOF REPAIR)

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.
Councilman Markham offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Order:

ORDER #16286 ORDER AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF LEASE AGREEMENT BETWEEN JAMARD WRIGHT AND THE CITY OF MERIDIAN (CAFÉ SPACE AT UNION STATION)

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.

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

RESO. #6095 RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI, GRANTING TAX EXEMPTION FROM AD VALOREM TAXES TO THE CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL AS AUTHORIZED BY SECTIONS 27-31-1 (D) AND 79-11-33 OF THE MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, AS AMENDED

And, Councilman Hammon 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 Henson offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Ordinance:

ORDI. #4479 ORDINANCE AMENDING THE CITY’S ELECTION COMMISSIONERS AND MANAGERS COMPENSATION ORDINANCE BY AMENDING SECTIONS 8-3 AND 8-10 OF THE CODE OF ORDINANCES OF THE CITY OF MERIDIAN

And, Councilman Thomas 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. #6096

RESOLUTION APPROVING AND ADOPTING THE AMENDED BUDGET FOR THE CITY OF MERIDIAN FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2017, AND DIRECTING THE CITY CLERK IN REFERENCE THERETO

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.

Motion was made by Councilwoman Henson duly seconded by Councilman Markham and passed by a majority vote of the Council to approve the claims docket dated February 2, 2017 in the amount of $5,823,726.85. Voting yea: Thomas, Markham, Henson, Houston. Voting nay: Hammon.

President Houston called on Mayor Bland for his report: Mayor Bland said that each year thousands of Mississippians across all social and economic backgrounds struggle with a mental health crisis, and the first responders are the people that serve as the first point of contact during these behavior health crises. Mayor Bland presented a proclamation to Jill Walsh, declaring February as “Crisis Intervention Team Awareness Month” and Captain John Griffith thanked Ms. Walsh as playing a vital role in getting the officers trained in crisis intervention. Mayor Bland reported that Thursday, February 9th, the City of Meridian will host a Job Fair at the Tommy E. Dulaney Center, from 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. The Meridian Job Fair is partnering with the Governor’s Job Fair Network, WIN Job Center, Mississippi State University, Meridian Community College, Miss Dept. of Employment Security, WTOK-TV and 97-OKK, Q101, KISS-104.1 and 105.7 The Beat local radio stations. Seventy employers have set up stations at the fair, ready to hire new employees. Mayor Bland urged local citizens and citizens from surrounding communities to take advantage of this great opportunity to attend the job fair if they are looking for a job. Arbor Day will be Friday, February 10th, @ 10:00 a.m. in front of St. Patrick School. Mississippi Power has donated fruit trees and plants, and the St. Patrick students will present a short program celebrating the benefits of trees in our communities and lives. Free fruit trees will be given away; you must be present to receive a tree. If there are questions concerning the event; contact Craig Wilks in the Community Development Division.

Mayor Bland spoke on the paving progress being done in the city and fact that APAC is doing a good job, they are right on schedule and in some regards ahead of schedule. Mayor Bland called
on Hugh Smith, Public Works Director to come up and answer any specific questions the council had on the paving program.

President Houston called for citizens comments.
   a) Allen Shute - spoke

President Houston called for Council comments:

Councilman Hammon said our maintenance costs on equipment runs anywhere from two and a half to three million dollars a year. We have a lease vehicle program now to try to trim some of that cost. But the bottom line here is that we selected the vendor for a reason, because I know the maintenance on the life of that vehicle would cost us over fifty thousand dollars. So before accusations are made incorrectly, do more research, get more facts before going off in the wrong direction. Another issue is the crime, I still wish we would solve some of the problems, it’s doable, we know what we can do and we know what we are not willing to do. Elections coming up, before we vote for people consider if they will stand up for what is right, put things in place, stand behind them and stand their ground. If we do that, maybe we will have folks in here who are willing to do something about the problems to make the city a better place.

Councilman Markham said he agreed with Councilman Hammon on the subject of the bid for the bulldozer. If we can state why the next highest bid was chosen, this is perfectly acceptable and legal. And a letter of explanation was exhibited with the order stating the reasons as to why the bid was chosen. February is Black History Month, and as I have done for the last three years, I would like to take time to highlight an esteemed individual. This year I would like to mention David Blackwell; he was a world renowned statistician and mathematician, born April 24, 1919, died in 2010. He believed in finding the least complicated answer to the problems put before him and tried introduce ways to look at a problem to make it more understandable for the masses. David Blackwell was the 1st African American inducted into the National Academy of Sciences. Councilman Markham encouraged our young people to strive, ask questions, investigate and work out a problem because no one else may have done so. This is something to apply to your life, challenge yourself, and figure it out. Work to achieve knowledge. Support Arbor Day, and thank you Mr. Smith for the update on paving. I know it must feel as if you are giving a deposition with the bombardment of questions, but we appreciate your competent answers. We will have a work session on February 14th, and the public is welcome to attend, we will have a comprehensive report from Mr. Hugh Smith on the paving as it relates to the areas covered.

Councilman Thomas said there have been a lot of good things that we’ve talked about that relates to the City of Meridian. The first thing I hear is paving, paving, paving. Why is this street, or that street blocked? Public works and the police block the streets to protect the citizens while the work is being done. And after the paving is put down it has to set before you can drive over it. As I’ve said before, there are a lot of good things going on in Meridian. The
Riley Center has an ongoing season and they just announced another great lineup of shows; the Meridian Little Theatre is getting ready for another production. The offerings we have here you can’t get in some big major cities like New York and San Francisco. But here in Meridian, we even have a symphony; very few cities in the United States have a symphony. We have a symphony in Meridian that brings in world renowned soloists to perform! MCC has an Art and Letters series going on, they have an art museum you can go out and view. The Meridian Arts Museum right here across the street has a wonderful collection that any museum throughout this nation would love to have in their permanent collection. They don’t charge you to come to see these things; you just walk in and participate in the joy of fine arts. The art museum also has an art program. Marti Gras is coming up, the city tries to provide a lot of activities downtown for the community to come out and enjoy. We have youngsters at Meridian High School that are fine artists, I know of one that is going to have their artwork displayed in New York City. The art teacher out there does a phenomenal job, she happens to be my granddaughter so I’m going to brag on her. The arts program at Meridian High, the music program, the theatre program, there are many opportunities there, mock trial teams winning championships, debate teams winning championships, a great many good things offered. I know Dustin and I talk a lot about athletics, athletics are an important part of a child’s opportunities, at Meridian High School for example, there are students receiving scholarships for assistance to go to college because of the athletic programs. There are many getting scholarships because of the academic abilities also, there are posters around town about the students getting 30 or above on the ACT Test, there are a lot of those. A lot of kids are going to college because of football scholarships, basketball scholarships, softball scholarships, track and field scholarships, there are children going to college because they played sports. Many of the students would not be able to go to college if they did not have these athletic programs available to them. Tomorrow afternoon @ 4:30 there will be two female athletes from Meridian High School signing to go to two universities on a soccer scholarship and on a track scholarship. If they had not had that opportunity to participate in a sports program, they would not be signing to attend college on these sports scholarships. Dustin and I know these athletic programs are not as important as the academic programs, but athletics provide some students with opportunity to go places they probably would have never gone, but for that ability in a sporting program. We have former Meridian High School graduates that went to universities all over this nation. So, there are a lot of good opportunities out there and I hope people support these youngsters as they participate in these activities. Meridian is a good place to live, most of us have a better life than we ever thought we would have, maybe one or two don’t, but most of us have a good life.

President Houston said thank you all for coming out this morning, we do want to support the Meridian Public School District as a whole, athletically and academically, from kindergarten through high school. By showing up, volunteering, taking a few minutes to speak to the kids and encourage them. Tonight here at City Hall @ 5:30 we will be having our annual ‘Shaking Hands With Our Future’ event; this will give our youngsters the opportunity to shake hands with our professionals. So they can see and be inspired to do more, and be more, right here in Meridian. On February 18-19, 2017, we will have the playground equipment for James Chaney Park. We are doing a community build. So, Mr. Hood, we need you and your crew to come out and all other community organizations to come out and help get that playground put
together. To show we can do some positive things in Ward 4 to make some good things happen in that community. That park has been off the map for a while, but I thank God for Mr. McGruder, The Mayor, and everybody else that has played a role in helping bring this project back to life. We talked about the Art Museum across the street, but the Wechsler School Building is one of the first African American brick school building that was built in Mississippi with public funds. They are in need of a roof. They have secured a grant and they need $21,000 to match that grant, and we are asking the citizens of Meridian, let’s pull together to raise the funds, and we are also working on some other things to make this happen. So we are asking the people of Meridian if you attended Wechsler or not, please give $5.00, $10.00 anything you can give to meet this need. If more information is needed please get with me after the meeting or look at my face book page. We will have a work session on February 14, 2017 @ 9:30 a.m., at Union Station. Volunteering makes a difference, it makes an impact in somebody’s life, and you never know what that person may become.

Councilwoman Houston said at this time we will determine whether we will go into executive session concerning economic development, potential litigation with possible action to follow.

An executive session was requested regarding economic development, potential litigation with possible action to follow. Motion was made by Councilman Thomas duly seconded by Councilman Markham 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 Councilman Markham and unanimously passed by the Council to declare an executive session in order to discuss economic development, potential litigation with possible action to follow. The Council then went into executive session. (Councilman Markham recused himself prior to the discussion on one of the issues put forth, because of a potential conflict of interest) Motion was made by Councilman Thomas duly seconded by Councilman Hammon and unanimously passed by the Council to go out of executive session.

President Houston called the regular meeting back to order.

The agenda was amended to add the following actions following the executive session:

a. Order terminating development and reimbursement agreement with RCG-Meridian Phase II, LLC.

b. Resolution clarifying terms of reverter clause in Resolution #6070 and 6089 for River Place, LLC.

c. Order authorizing engagement of Clyde X. Copeland, III to legally pursue recovery costs incurred by city for repairs of drainage collapse on North Frontage Road.

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

ORDER #16287 ORDER TERMINATING DEVELOPMENT AND REIMBURSEMENT
AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE CITY OF MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI
AND RCG-MERIDIAN PHASE II, LLC DATED APRIL 4, 2016

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

RESO. #6097 RESOLUTION CLARIFYING THE TERMS OF THE CLAUSE OF REVERTER APPROVED BY RESOLUTION #6070 AND #6089 DEFINING THE BEGINNING FOR THE CONSTRUCTION PHASE OF DEVELOPMENT AND AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR TO EXECUTE A RELEASE AND TERMINATION OF REVERSIONARY INTEREST FOR EACH LOT

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

ORDER #16288 RESOLUTION AND ORDER AUTHORIZING ENGAGEMENT OF CLYDE X. COPELAND, III TO PURSUE RECOVERY OF COST INCURRED FOR REPAIRS TO THE DRAINAGE STRUCTURE ON NORTH FRONTAGE ROAD RESULTING FROM THE COLLAPSE OF THE STRUCTURE ON NOVEMBER 7, 2015

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

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

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

Jo Ann Clark, Clerk of Council