REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING, TUESDAY, APRIL 17, 2018 AT 5:00 P.M.

Meeting called to order by Council President Thomas.

Present: Thomas, T. Johnson, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann.

Absent: None.

The meeting was opened with prayer by Melvin J. Hendricks of First Union Missionary Baptist Church and followed by the pledge to the flag.

Motion was made by Councilman T. Johnson duly seconded by Councilman Lindemann and passed by a unanimous vote of the Council to confirm the agenda with the following amendments: Remove: R-2 (Order authorizing execution of Memorandum of Understanding between the city and the Boys and Girls Club.) Add: R-5 (Order ratifying a state of emergency due to tornado caused damages within the city on April 14, 2018.); R-6 (Order authorizing the waiver of permit fees to persons repairing damage done by the tornado on April 14, 2018.); R-7 (Order authorizing submittal of grant application to the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) for Disaster Assistance Housing Grant Program.); R-8 (Resolution authorizing advertisement: Architect for the Wechsler Foundation improvements.) Voting yea: Thomas, T. Johnson, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann. Voting nay: None.

Motion was made by Councilman T. Johnson duly seconded by Councilwoman F. Johnson and passed by a unanimous vote of the Council to approve the minutes dated April 03, 2018. Voting yea: Thomas, T. Johnson, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann. Voting nay: None.

Councilwoman F. Johnson offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Order:

ORDER #16537 ORDER AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF SERVICE AGREEMENT BETWEEN WASTE PRO AND THE CITY OF MERIDIAN (MERIDIAN HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE DAY)

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

Yea: Thomas, T. Johnson, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann.
Nay: None.
Councilwoman F. Johnson offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Order:

ORDER #16538 IN THE MATTER OF: CONFIRMING THE APPOINTMENT BY THE MAYOR OF BRANDYE S. LATIMER AS CITY CLERK/CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER FOR 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, T. Johnson, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann.
Nay: None.

Motion was made by Councilman T. Johnson duly seconded by Councilwoman F. Johnson and passed by a unanimous vote of the Council to approve the claims docket dated April 12, 2018 in the amount of $2,114,333.84. Voting yea: Thomas, T. Johnson, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann. Voting nay: None.

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

ORDER #16539 ORDER RATIFYING DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY BY THE MAYOR OF THE CITY OF MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI, DUE TO DAMAGE CAUSED BY TORNADO AND SEVERE WEATHER CONDITIONS ON APRIL 14, 2018

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

Yea: Thomas, T. Johnson, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann.
Nay: None.

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

ORDER #16540 ORDER WAIVING COST OF BUILDING, ELECTRICAL, MECHANICAL AND PLUMBING FEES FOR REPAIRING
STRUCTURAL DAMAGES DONE BY THE TORNADO OF APRIL 14, 2018

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

Yea: Thomas, T. Johnson, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann.
Nay: None.

Councilwoman F. Johnson offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Order:

ORDER #16541 ORDER AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION AND SUBMISSION OF DISASTER ASSISTANCE HOUSING GRANT PROGRAM APPLICATION & ESTABLISH FUND THROUGH THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF EAST MISSISSIPPI

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

Yea: Thomas, T. Johnson, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann.
Nay: None.

Councilwoman F. Johnson offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Resolution:

RESO. #6179 RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING ADVERTISING AND SELECTION OF ARCHITECTURAL FIRM TO PREPARE COST ESTIMATES FOR THE MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG) ON BEHALF OF THE WECHSLER FOUNDATION

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

Yea: Thomas, T. Johnson, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann.
Nay: None.

President Thomas advised of the notification of legal advertisement for the following:
a) Architect for the Wechsler Foundation Improvements

President Thomas called on Mayor Bland for his report:

Mayor Bland said I want to thank the Council on what you have done and what you are now doing to support the community after the tornado. I want to thank my storm response team, they started work at Union Station from 11:00 a.m. Saturday and they are still hard at it. I also want to thank the community, because there were a lot of volunteers, sometimes just common folk that care about their fellow man. They cut and moved trees out the streets, provided food and drink to the effected citizens and workers on the ground. We have a lot more work to do and we are putting people in place to get the community going again. I want to bring up Mr. Ron Turner, Director of the Meridian Housing Authority, to come in to give you a report on the how the Housing Authority stands right now. We are using a lot of their data to send to MEMA and FEMA so that we can get our statistics together to try to recoup some of the money used back into our funds that were used to get the destruction cleared. Ron has severe damage to some of his units and they have been assisting those impacted residents to move to hotels. Ron Turner thanked the Mayor and congratulated Brandye Latimer on her promotion to City Clerk. Mr. Turner said he wanted to bring the City Council up to date on some of the progress the Housing Authority has made since the EF-2 Tornado hit Meridian on April 14, 2018. There were 22 families displaced, meaning roughly 50 people. We have worked expeditiously to bring their lives back to normal. Currently those 22 families are being temporarily housed in area hotels. Breakdowns of the actual damages per unit are: George Reece Courts 10 buildings damaged; Eastern Gardens all 4 units were affected by the storm; Highway Village 12 buildings damaged; Oakland Heights 5 Buildings. We also manage scattered sites and there were 8 buildings damaged. Five of the buildings must have trees removed. Total number of structures damaged with the Housing Authority is 80 structures. The total repair estimate is Two Million dollars. We have met with the families displaced and those 22 families will soon be able to go into 22 vacancies we will have available within the Housing Authority. A question of if the families will be able to go back to their prior location once repaired – HUD usually doesn’t allow that, but one lady, Ms. Rose McClelland, an 86 year old resident that has been in that facility for 40 years, has our pledge to her, to move her back to that facility once repaired. There is a Trustmark account now set up for donations for those families displaced from the Housing Authority; the funds will be equally divided among those families. We are also waiving those families’ rent for this month because of this hardship. Hugh Smith, Public Works Director, said that their department went into response mode soon after the storm hit over the weekend. We had six crews working late into the night Saturday. The County loaned us some equipment and manpower. A lot of hard work was done and fatigue set in late into the night with the wait for utility crews to clear buildings before some of the work could be done. But we are proud of the fact that in that type of stressful environment we had no employee injuries or equipment damage.
President Thomas called for citizen comments:

a) Allen Shute – spoke
b) Bob Huff - spoke
c) Saveda Williams – spoke

President Thomas called for Council comments:

Councilman Lindemann said thank you responders and volunteers for your actions during the aftermath of the tornado for the last few days. I also want to thank the East Mississippi Realtors for committing to fighting homelessness in Meridian. We are looking at a few areas where tiny houses might become a reality as a solution to homelessness. Also the Opioid Task Force is having their quarterly meeting this Thursday from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. Thanks to Wesley House for providing a location for that. I spent some time last week talking to some business owners in the downtown area. Mayor, I would like to explore some type of ordinance that would allow customer parking, and maybe some type of solution to the parking garage not being used currently, so with all these exciting things that are happening downtown, we are really prepared for the influx of traffic and dealing with that in a reasonable way. Thank you all for coming.

Councilwoman Houston said good evening everyone, I echo Councilman Lindemann regarding the response of our volunteers and administration. We thank the workers with the boots on the ground and appreciate them keeping the city moving. We have our annual fishing derby, if weather permits, at Q.V. Sykes Park next Saturday, 750 pounds of catfish. The ages are from 5 -12, so bring your kids out to catch some of those catfish, otherwise I’ll be back over there catching them myself. Be careful with contractors, I’m sure the Mayor can vouch for this, being in the insurance world himself. I know there are a lot of people out there that will scam you just to get the insurance money and you will never see them again. So make sure you don’t give people money until they get the job done. Boys basketball will be happening this summer as well, registration is going on right now. I believe ages 10-14 for summer league. James Chaney Day is going to happen, Memorial Day Weekend, April 26th, at the James Chaney Memorial Park. We are excited to have a basketball court that we hope to be finished by then. And I challenge Councilman Tyrone Johnson to meet me on the court that day! We’ll see what’s going to happen. I’ve heard things about how you play. We want to support all the things going on in our city. It’s been amazing and phenomenal to see how we’ve come together to do what we need to do to keep the city moving. Councilman Johnson I’ve been seeing you work and it’s great how your ward over there is pulling together, that’s really awesome. So thank you all for coming out tonight. Brandy, congratulations on your promotion and I look forward to working with you.

Councilwoman F. Johnson said congratulations again Brandy. Thanks everybody. Thursday night the Jail Ministry is having their annual fund raiser. If you haven’t been, check it out, it helps them support the extra needs of people in the system. Friday night there is a basketball game, Tracy Bragg on Facebook, the Parent Circle Group. They
always need extra volunteers to help with those projects. Thank you all for coming out.

Councilman T. Johnson said, to reiterate Councilman Lindermann and Councilwoman Houston, thank you for all of the support you brought over to Ward 2 after the tornado, it does not go unnoticed. I really appreciate everything that you’ve done. Many people of Ward 2 send their thanks as well. I’ve been going out to the jail facility for the last few months, I normally play basketball with some of the inmates there, some of them are about to be released back into the real world. So, if any of you have any advice for them let me know, so I can try to help these guys when they come back home. Help them by finding jobs, a place to live and things of that nature. The Velma Young Playground ribbon cutting was Friday, the kid have not stopped, the tornado was all that kept them off that playground. So, thank you for all the support from Parks and Recreation and Public Works. I also want to commend Mr. Richie McAlister, he was out there with the chain saw, and you all should have seen him Saturday. We really appreciate that, it shows this community really cares. I heard Councilman Lindermann speaking on the parking garage issue, I think when a ticket is purchased for a downtown event we should possibly consider, linking that ticket to transport from the garage to and from the event. That’s just an idea I want to put out there. Thank you all for the helpful things you do.

Council President Thomas said, I did see Tyrone out there working too, not just Richie, which is good to see. I hope the soccer fields are in good shape, because we have hundreds of soccer players coming with State Games. I forget how many teams, but it’s going to be on a regular basis. So whatever we need to do out there we need to do it. I’m still waiting on pickleball to get started; it’s going to be a big event at the State Games. I’ve been talking to you about it for about a year now, a big, big sport for a lot of older folks. Mr. McGruder is going to have it all arranged by next week, right?

An executive session was requested regarding economic development. Motion was made by Councilman T. Johnson duly seconded by Councilwoman F. Johnson and unanimously passed by the Council to close the meeting to determine whether to declare an executive session. Motion was made by Councilwoman Houston duly seconded by Councilman T. Johnson and unanimously passed by the Council to declare an executive session in order to discuss economic development. The Council then went into executive session. Motion was made by Councilwoman Houston duly seconded by Councilwoman F. Johnson and unanimously passed by the Council to go out of executive session. The meeting was called to order with no action taken.

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