REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING, TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2020 AT 5:00 P.M.

Meeting called to order by Council President, Kim Houston.

Present: Thomas, F. Johnson (via phone), Houston, Lindemann.

Absent: None.

The meeting was opened with prayer by Pastor Odell Hopkins, West Mt. Moriah Baptist Church and followed by the pledge to the flag.

Motion was made by Councilman Thomas duly seconded by Councilman Lindemann and passed by a unanimous vote of the Council to confirm the agenda with the following amendments: Remove: C-3 (Order authorizing Glock 22, .40 caliber handguns declared surplus and used as trade-in for new Glock Model 45, Gen 5 9mm handguns.) Add: R-7 (Mayors declaration of emergency: Coronavirus COVID-19 Virus Pandemic.) Add: R-8 (Order granting administrative leave with pay: Coronavirus COVID-19 Virus Pandemic.) Add: R-9 (Order waiving late fees and no disconnections of water services: Coronavirus Pandemic.) Remove: P-2 (Presentation to Carter Foundation’s Tourism Video Grand Prize Winner, Freedom Project’s 1st Runner-up, and Boys and Girls Club of East Mississippi’s 2nd Runner-up. Presented by: Dede Mogollon-Tourism Bureau, Bill Hannah-EMBDC, and Derron Radcliff-United Way.) Voting yea: Thomas, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann. Voting nay: None.

Motion made by Councilman Thomas duly seconded by Councilman Lindemann and passed by a unanimous vote of the Council to approve the minutes dated February 21, 2020 and March 03, 2020. Voting yea: Thomas, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann. Voting nay: None.

Motion was made by Councilman Thomas duly seconded by Councilman Lindemann and unanimously passed by the Council to approve the following Proclamations to be issued by the Mayor:

March 26, 2020 – “League of Women Voters Day”
March 2020 – “National Women’s History Month”

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

RESO. #6260 RESOLUTION AMENDING RESOLUTION #6259 ENTITLED “RESOLUTION APPOINTING DEPUTY CLERKS OF THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS’ TO CORRECT THE NAME TRISHA RAINER TO TRISHA RIVERS

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

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

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

ORDER #16925 ORDER AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF CONTINUING DISCLOSURE ENGAGEMENT LETTER AGREEMENT BETWEEN BUTLER SNOW LLP AND THE CITY OF MERIDIAN (DISSEMINATION AGENT)

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

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

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

ORDER #16926 ORDER AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF A SUPPORT SERVICES AGREEMENT BETWEEN TERRY SERVICE, INC., AND THE CITY OF MERIDIAN (HEATING & COOLING SYSTEM CITY HALL)

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

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

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

ORDER #16927 ORDER AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF LAND USE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE CITY OF MERIDIAN AND CELTIC WARRIOR CHALLENGE, LLP (OBSTACLE COURSE RACE)

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

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

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

ORDER #16928  ORDER ALLOCATING FY 2020 BUDGET SUBSIDY CONTRIBUTION TO MERIDIAN BONITA LAKES DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (MBLDA)

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

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

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

RESO #6261  RESOLUTION Approving AND ADOPTING THE AMENDED BUDGET FOR THE CITY OF MERIDIAN FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2020, AND DIRECTING THE CITY CLERK IN REFERENCE THERETO

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

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

Motion was made by Councilman Thomas duly seconded by Councilman Lindemann and passed by a majority vote of the Council to approve Section (1) Payroll of the claims docket in the amount of $999,151.50. Voting yea: Thomas, F. Johnson, Houston. Voting nay: Lindemann.

Motion was made by Councilman Thomas duly seconded by Councilman Lindemann and passed by a unanimous vote of the Council to approve Section (2) Mandatory & Operational Items of the claims docket in the amount of $2,516,905.16. Voting yea: Thomas, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann. Voting nay: None.

Total amount approved/passed $3,516,056.66 claims docket dated, March 12, 2020.

Council President Houston – Can you give us some details on this so all the citizens will know what’s going on with this Coronavirus issue.

Doug Stephens - The city wants to put this order in place to fight exposure to the spread of this virus to be in line with what the state and county has already done, so if anytime in the future there is a possibility of funds for any reimbursement, we have to have this process in place.
Council President Houston - Are we having conversations with the hospitals, are we communicating and trying to get some type of game plan in the event that things get crazy. I know we may not have a plan altogether, but are we having conversations that the city is ready to cooperate with the hospitals and things of that nature, so we can have an idea that if things break loose we will have somewhat of a game plan?

Doug Stephens - We attended meetings today with the two major hospitals, the state department of health, representatives of the city and county, and the school systems and discussed many different options that come into play. This is a moving target that can change constantly. We are in contact daily sometimes multiple times per day, to keep up with events understanding that plans may have to change immediately depending on events. One of the things that have come out of the meetings from the first responders and the hospitals is that individuals that have the signs and symptoms of the virus is that they do not go to the medical facility, call the facility first! They are trying to limit exposure for our healthcare providers. If you just show up and you test positive for the virus, you have exposed that entire clinic or emergency room and those healthcare professionals. This now has limited us in our ability to care for those with and without the virus. There is a treatment plan to treat the signs and symptoms of the virus and the hospitals are well prepared to do that. And there is talk about how to do the testing and they have those guidelines. We are asking that you call ahead and don't just show up at these medical locations!

Council President Houston - Thank you Doug! I appreciate the excellent job that you did of filling in under your many titles, and you are still doing an outstanding job keeping us informed and in the loop of things, we appreciate you.

Doug Stephens - Thank you, we are going to do what’s best home and move forward.

Councilman Thomas - And on the national level they are urging people if they have things scheduled that they don't have to do, elective surgery, dental surgery, elective things like that, they are asking people to see if they can see if they can be postponed. To leave the beds in the hospitals available in case they are needed for this virus.

Doug Stephens - To give a quick status update, confirmed as of today, the state of Mississippi has 21 cases and tested 389 individuals. I want to give out this Coronavirus hotline number to the Mississippi Department of Health 1-877-978-6453 for anyone with questions and concerns.

CAO, Eddie Kelly - I want to add that if the situation gets worse, we have got to consider the public health and your health, with this Coronavirus we may need to talk to the Council about trying to amend or make things a little more amenable for the public's health. I just wanted to put that on the table. We are having to do business a lot different than we used to, so we have to make sure the public is safe and all public officials are safe. We may need to talk to you about that, using technology and other means we can come up with and still have the public included into these meetings.

Council President Houston - Since we are declaring Meridian a state of emergency should the need arise for us to make our meetings closed or cancelled or move them, would that give us some leeway from the 72 hours window, does anybody know?

Councilman Thomas - We could call an emergency meeting pretty quickly.

Council President Houston - Or cancel a meeting, Kermit?

Attorney, Kermit Kendrick - Yes, I spoke with Mr. Hood yesterday, there is really no guidance as far as, how to make a meeting inclusive, his recommendation to the city was that we should follow all public health guidelines, that if we wanted to make meetings inclusive that we put in our notice that all of the meetings could be live-streamed, or if we want to do it
telephonic where all of this would be put on YouTube where the public would have access to it. Then there would be no reason to suspect anything was going on behind closed doors that the public wouldn’t have access to.

Council President Houston – Is that something that the Council should on tonight or is that something we can play by ear?

Attorney Kendrick – I believe you can play it by ear Councilwoman Houston.

Council President Houston – Thank you all.

Councilman Thomas – Mr. Mayor, are you going to talk about the city facilities and all of that in your report?

Mayor Bland – I can, to have an emergency meeting we don’t have to do the 72 hours to alert the media, we can have an emergency meeting by alerting the media within one hour. With all that is going on right now it is a possibility, but we don’t foresee that right now. Things are changing daily and if we have some information or need to change an ordinance that needs immediate action we will need to have an emergency meeting.

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

ORDER #16929 ORDER RATIFYING DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY BY THE MAYOR OF THE CITY OF MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI, DUE TO THE (CORONAVIRUS) COVID-19 VIRUS PANDEMIC

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

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

Councilman Thomas – What this will do is allow the State Legislature to pass a law saying that anyone furloughed or put on leave because of the Coronavirus, they could continue to receive their salary. The situation is that a lot of people put on leave or furlough are some of the lowest paid personnel, and for them to go two, three, four weeks without pay because of the virus is just not right to those people. It was not their choice not to come to work, it was the city telling them not to come to work. So, I’m glad the State Legislature did that today!

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

ORDER #16930 ORDER GRANTING ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE WITH PAY TO EMPLOYEES OF GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES IN THE EVENT OF CERTAIN DISASTER OR EMERGENCIES (CORONAVIRUS) COVID-19 VIRUS PANDEMIC

And, Councilman Lindemann seconded the motion, whereupon said Order was discussed, passed and adopted by the Council by a vote as follows:
Councilman Thomas – Again, I want to mention, just because it's not being disconnected, does not mean your bill will go away, you will still owe the bill. If you are out of work and can't pay it, we are not encouraging people to not pay their bill. What we are saying is, if you have not been allowed to go to work and your financial situation during this virus prohibits you paying right now it could be delayed.

Council President Houston – We are basically encouraging you to make payments if you can, don’t stop paying, but if you can't pay, we won't turn your water off or charge you a late fee.

CAO Eddie Kelly – We will waive late fees during this period, but after this period, we will not waive late fees.

Councilman Thomas – If you put it off for a couple of months you will have a significant bill.

CAO Eddie Kelly – Yes, it gets worse the longer you delay paying.

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

ORDER #16931 ORDER WAIVING LATE FEES AND NO DISCONNECTIONS OF WATER SERVICES DURING THE 30-DAYS OF EMERGENCY CONDITIONS (CORONAVIRUS) COVID-19 VIRUS PANDEMIC

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

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

President Houston called for the Mayor’s Report:

Mayor Bland – I just want to reiterate that we have met with the hospitals, administrators, and people in the medical field, they tell us to continue to communicate to the citizens to call in to the medical facilities, don’t just show up if you have symptoms of the virus. If your temp is over 101 or 102 be mindful of exposure to others call the hotline for instructions.

The Meridian Activity has suspended services, Bonita Lakes suspended recreational activities, Velma Young Center, Carousel and all rentals are being refunded right now. We will continue to be alert to all that is going on right now and make decisions based on how it relates to the conditions of this virus.

Councilman Thomas – They don’t recommend more than 10 people congregate, which we are violating with this meeting. What are we going to do about spring sports, youth and adults?

Park & Rec. Dir., Trent Posey – I don't think anybody's jumping the gun right now.
They are kind of delaying everything until the end of March, waiting for more information. Every local organization has pretty much suspended everything until the end of the month and make decisions after that.

Mayor Bland – We are trying not to make a quick decision to shut everything down, as far as recreational activities and people coming to the Activity Center and other things, that’s for the safety of our citizens and employees working there. But as we move forward I know things like baseball and summer sports have been pushed back.

Mayor Bland - One last thing, we do have feeding programs going on right now with the Meridian Public Schools, Dr. Carter and Mr. Hood with the Boys and Girls Club, between 1:00 & 2:00 p.m. at Boy and Girls Club @ 45th Avenue, and the Velma Young Center simultaneously. They are also requesting and working with churches and others that have vans to transport the bags home to the children. So, depending how long school is out, we have this week and next week. Whenever there is need, a lot of people in this community come together. Dr. Carter is trying to feed as many children that are out this summer. So, if you all have any people or churches that would like to volunteer please contact our office and we can get them in contact with Dr. Carter’s office to help with the transport issues to these families.

Councilman Thomas – I notice that Vowels Super Market is doing the same thing, they can come by there and pick up a meal.

President Houston called for citizen comments:
   a) Melinda Vinson Northam – spoke
   b) Tommy Williams - spoke

President Houston called for Council comments:

   Various comments were made.

   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