REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2020 AT 5:00 P.M.

Meeting called to order by Council President, Houston.

Present: Thomas, Davis, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann.
Absent: None.

The meeting was opened with prayer by Councilman Dwayne Davis, followed by the pledge to the flag.

Motion was made by Councilman Thomas duly seconded by Councilwoman F. Johnson and passed by a unanimous vote of the Council to confirm the agenda with the following changes: Move R-3 and make it R-11 (Order authorizing Memorandum of Agreement with Miss. Department of Transportation.) Table R-8 (Ordinance setting millage rate for the City of Meridian.) Remove R-9 (FY’2020 budget amendments.) Voting yea: Thomas, Davis, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann. Voting nay: None.

Motion made by Councilwoman F. Johnson duly seconded by Councilman Davis and passed by a unanimous vote of the Council to approve the minutes dated September 1, 2020. Voting yea: Thomas, Davis, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann. Voting nay: None.

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

ORDER #17006 ORDER DESIGNATING AXON ENTERPRISE, INC., AS THE SOLE SOURCE SUPPLIER FOR TASERS CONDUCTED ENERGY WEAPONS FOR THE MERIDIAN POLICE DEPARTMENT

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

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

Council President Kim Houston, announced the Congratulation Certificate presentation to Jamal Roberts from the Meridian City Council for his achievements in gospel music: Councilwoman Fannie Johnson, read aloud the Council Certificate to present to Mr. Roberts.

Mr. Roberts was present to accept the certificate; he offered his gratitude and thanks, and he sang a few notes: “Lord whatever you’re doing, don’t do it without me!”

Councilwoman F. Johnson offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Resolution:
RESO. #6289  RESOLUTION CALLING A HEARING TO DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT CERTAIN PARCELS OF LAND ARE IN SUCH A STATE OF UNCLEANLINESS AS TO BE A MENACE TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY OF THE COMMUNITY

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

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

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

ORDER #17007  ORDER AUTHORIZING THE SUBMISSION OF PROJECT APPLICATION WITH THE MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (MDOT) FOR THE FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2020 TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM GRANT FUNDS

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

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

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

ORDER #17008  ORDER RE-ESTABLISHING PETTY CASH FUNDS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021

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

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

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

ORDER #17009  ORDER TO CHARGE OFF INACTIVE AND UNCOLLECTIBLE WATER ACCOUNTS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2019 IN THE AMOUNT OF $162,878.94
And, Councilman Thomas seconded the motion, whereupon said Order was discussed, passed and adopted by the Council by a vote as follows:

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

Councilman Davis offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Ordinance:

ORDI. #4537  ORDINANCE CLOSING, VACATING AND ABANDONING IN THE CITY OF MERIDIAN, LAUDERDALE COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI, FOR A PORTION OF KNIGHT-PARKER ROAD

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

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

Councilman Davis offered and moved the adoption and passage of the following Ordinance:

ORDI. #4538  ORDINANCE TO PROVIDE A REVENUE AND LEVY A TAX FOR THE MERIDIAN SEPARATE SCHOOL DISTRICT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2021

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

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

Motion was made by Councilwoman F. Johnson and duly seconded by Councilman Davis to discuss R-8 (Ordinance setting millage rate for the City of Meridian). After discussion a motion was made by Councilman Thomas and duly seconded by Councilman Lindemann and passed by a unanimous vote to Table the issue. Voting yea: Thomas, Davis, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann. Voting nay: None. Tabled

Motion was made by Councilman Thomas duly seconded by Councilwoman F. Johnson and passed by a majority vote of the Council to approve Section (1) Payroll of the claims docket in the amount of $2,266,893.53. Voting yea: Thomas, Davis, F. Johnson, Houston. Voting nay: Lindemann.

Motion was made by Councilman Thomas duly seconded by Councilwoman F. Johnson and passed by a unanimous vote of the Council to approve Section (2) Mandatory & Operational Items of the claims docket in the amount of $1,290,981.34 less payment
in the amount of $10,020.05 leaving $1,280,961.29. Voting yea: Thomas, Davis, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann. Voting nay: None. **Total amount approved/passed $3,547,854.82** claims docket dated, September 11, 2020.

The hour having reached 5:30, a motion was made by Councilman Lindemann and duly seconded by Councilwoman F. Johnson to recess this Regular Council Meeting for consideration to open the Public Hearing on the proposed budget and tax levies for FY’2021, the motion passed by a unanimous vote of the Council.

Motion was made to open the Public Hearing by Councilman Thomas and duly seconded by Councilman Lindemann and passed by an unanimous vote of the Council.

Council President Houston called several times for anyone that wants to speak on the proposed FY’2021 City Budget. No one signed up to speak and no one stepped forward to speak. Motion was made by Councilman Thomas and duly seconded by Councilwoman F. Johnson to close the Public Hearing, the motion passed by a unanimous vote of the Council.

Motion was made by Councilman Lindemann and duly seconded by Councilwoman F. Johnson to reopen the Regular Council Meeting, the motion passed by a unanimous vote of the Council.

Mayor Bland - We have a special guest, The Mississippi Transportation Commissioner, Mr. Willie Simmons. Commissioner Simmons has been in office for nine months and we are very happy to have him here to speak with us and we appreciate him being here in Meridian tonight and seeing the same potential in Meridian we all see, and we are very excited about his passion for East Central Mississippi. He has spent a lot of time in the Mississippi Senate and he is famous for his abilities and relationships of working with people, and it shows by what he has been doing in and around Meridian and East Central Mississippi. He’s done a lot of work on a lot of projects in Meridian, he also helped us put lighting on the highway. He communicated to us over a year ago that he would do those things if given the opportunity. He was given that opportunity by the voters, and he is doing exactly what he said he would do. We really thank him for being here tonight.

Commissioner Simmons – I will be very brief and answer any questions you may have. It is really just a MOU between the City of Meridian and the Mississippi Department of Transportation that request the close of Knight Parker Road which in essence allows repairs to be made to a bridge along the 20/59 corridor. That cost would be about seven million dollars and this would save the state of Mississippi that money. We’ve talked to the residents that have a vested interest in that area and have worked all the details out and spoken with Councilman Davis earlier. So, basically this is a win-win for all parties involved.

Hugh Smith - The vote on the MOU to close Knight Parker Road that the Council has voted to do, that MOU also says that the MDOT will give us funds to repair or reroute Sweet Gum Bottom Road.

Commissioner Simmons – Mayor and City Council, thank you for allowing me to come, you here in East Mississippi are in the ideal location with two interstates connecting and all the other things that has happened over the years. In the estimate of the Central District you have a harasser that leads the city, which is the Mayor. He constantly harasses me to come to
the city to do these things. So, we want to be able to save some money, but at the same time to expedite the project and get it done. We saved some money on construction. So often if you want to get things done there is some inconvenience. This is one of those situations where the citizens will be inconvenienced for a while because of closing the road, they have to adjust by going around, but in the end, it is an improvement. Likewise, when we do the lights and expand the bridge on 59/20 which is a 25 million project that we will be doing with the city, the project will enhance the lighting as well as the widening of the bridges on the interstate system and it will inconvenience for a while. Anytime we do infrastructure projects, for safety reasons we have to have traffic control. Traffic control means your normal way of moving often times will change. So, those kinds of things will occur. Another thing we look forward to doing sometime in the near future that the Mayor and his staff has been talking to us about is working with you on highway maintaining, and improvements of 8th Street and some of the paving improvements that need to be done there. As you know we have already put some money north of you in Philadelphia and 19 North. And 19 is going to be completed so the four-lane traffic, more traffic will be coming through that system down to you. As your Commissioner, last year we said that we were going to work for East Mississippi, we work well with your legislative delegation and we are trying to get more money through the system and as we get more money we will work with you. Very soon we will be looking at the TAP Program, so hopefully, you will take advantage of this alternative program where we do sidewalks and those kinds of things.

Councilman Thomas – Do you have any idea when 19 will be finished?

Commissioner Simmons – We are doing a small amount of paving in comparison to all the money we’ve spent. Two years ago, when I was in the Senate we worked to get a lottery passed. We passed it and said we would put the first 8 million dollars to infrastructure, MDOT, after that education. Last year, the lottery rolled out in, I believe, October and by June 30 of this year, the state collected over 70 million dollars. The commissions then decided in February to put the first 30 million into paving and you have seen the paving we have done. And we are going to put additional money into paving. One of the projects we are going to do, the early part of next year we will be paving part of 19 and doing to other things to help work with that. So, sometime in the spring of next year.

Councilman Thomas – Sometime while you are in office I hope you will look at a North Meridian Bypass. About 40 years ago, at that time they told us we would have to have a traffic count, but we didn’t have roads so we couldn’t do a traffic count. We need a bypass to the north side of Meridian from around Marion to 19, to take some of the heavy traffic off our city streets.

Commissioner Simmons – That’s some of the things that we’ve got to talk about, it may be something you want to look at going forward, if you put it in the form of a bill grant and a bill grant is utilized in a lot of communities. We have a system within the Department of Transportation that we call MDO’s. East Mississippi is not included in that, we have Jackson, Gulf Coast, Hattiesburg, the north part of the state. Meridian is not included when they did it, before I came on board, it was not put in that category because of population, you would need the population or a connecting population to put you at the numbers needed. However, even the communities like Meridian that may not have that particular program, the bill grant is a great opportunity to take a look at that. I would love to sit with you all and your developer to talk about that sometime. Meridian really ought to be a hub so to speak, based on where you are located, not just focused on the highway system, but also on your rail and your airport system to make Meridian what you want it to be. As your commissioner, I’m committed to working toward that.
Council President Houston – One other thing, since you all are getting so much money from the lottery that is raking in these dollars; I don’t know exactly when it happened, but we were charged, municipalities were charged with grass cutting and things of that nature. Is there anyway you all can throw some money back into our public works department or take that task back on of cutting the grass along the interstate, to relieve some of the burden from our workers and our budget?

Commissioner Simmons – Once you get it, it’s hard for us to take it back.

Council President Houston – Even if it’s some funding, or grants to get mowers or equipment, anything we need to do so we can do it more efficiently and economically and not break our budget trying to do it. Even if giving us money to hire people to do handle it during that particular grass cutting season.

Commissioner Simmons – We are doing the interstate, but you are doing the other state highways?

Hugh Smith – We are doing all the bypasses, but we are also cutting the interstate on a more routine basis. Y’all do it twice yearly, be we are trying to do it once monthly or twice a month.

Commissioner Simmons – I make no commitment, I’ll try to have a conversation about it and see. Again, we at MDOT recognize, if we want to make the infrastructure system work, it has to work from top to bottom. We know when that 18-wheeler stops, it doesn’t park on the interstate, it goes to a state, county, or city road or street, so we understand that universal wholistic approach.

Council President Houston – We appreciate you working with us, thank you for coming. We appreciate you being visible and that was one of the commitments you made and like to see people stand by their word, so thank you.

Commissioner Simmons – We will be back.

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

ORDER #17010 ORDER AUTHORIZING EXECUTION OF MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE CITY OF MERIDIAN AND MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (KNIGHT-PARKER ROAD BRIDGE CLOSURES)

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

Yea: Thomas, Davis, F. Johnson, Houston, Lindemann.

Nay: None.

President Houston called for the Mayor’s Report:

Mayor Bland – Remember next Monday at 6:00 p.m. we will have the parade for Jamal Roberts at Dumont Plaza. If you want to line up for the parade, line up at the police department to come over the bridge to the plaza.

We have couple of new restaurants, Jacks Restaurant and a new Mexican Restaurant in the North Hills Shopping Center within the last few weeks. Also, on September 24th, in the
mall, the Hype will be opening in the mall, they are doing some work on the movie theater. They are improving the theater and we are excited about that.

We are excited to have our Transportation Commissioner, Willie Simmons here and I know a lot of people didn’t hear what he said, but he will be mentioned forever in this city if he can help pave from the Temple Theater all the way to College Park on 8th Street. We get a lot of hits through our Risk Manager because of that stretch of road. That’s a very big project that we can’t do with the money we have, but if MDOT helps with that project, it will be very big for the people in the City of Meridian.

President Houston called for citizen comments:

1. Melinda Vinson Northam – did not appear
2. Bill Wikstrom and Courtney Johnson - spoke
3. Eddie Holt - spoke

President Houston called for Council comments:

Various comments were made by the Council Members.

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