

COUNCIL OF COLUMBUS, GEORGIA

CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Council Chambers
C. E. "Red" McDaniel City Services Center- Second Floor
3111 Citizens Way, Columbus, GA 31906

April 30, 2024
9:00 AM
Consent Agenda / Work Session

C O N S E N T A G E N D A / W O R K S E S S I O N

PRESENT: Mayor B. H. "Skip" Henderson, III and Mayor Pro Tem R. Gary Allen (*Councilor District 1 Seat – Vacant*) and Councilors Tyson Begly, Joanne Cogle (arrived at 9:18 a.m.), Charmaine Crabb, Glenn Davis, R. Walker Garrett, Bruce Huff (arrived at 9:15 a.m.), Judy W. Thomas and Toyia Tucker (arrived via Microsoft Teams at 9:08 a.m.). City Manager Isaiah Hugley, City Attorney Clifton Fay, Clerk of Council Sandra T. Davis, and Deputy Clerk of Council Lindsey G. McLemore were present.

<p><u>The following documents have been included as a part of the electronic Agenda Packet:</u> (1) PreK-2 Intensive Literacy and Numeracy Initiative (2) Tax Allocation Update and (3) Blight Ordinances</p>
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CALL TO ORDER: Mayor B. H. "Skip" Henderson, III, Presiding

INVOCATION: Offered by Pastor Wayne Anthony, Saint Peter United Methodist Church of Columbus, Georgia

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Led by Mayor Henderson

C O N S E N T A G E N D A

MINUTES

1. Approval of minutes for the April 23, 2024, Council Meeting and Executive Session. Mayor Pro Tem Allen made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Councilor Garrett and carried unanimously by the six members present, with Councilors Cogle, Huff and Tucker being absent for the vote.

ORDINANCES

2. **Ordinance (24-022) - 2nd Reading-** REZN-02-24-0344: An Ordinance amending the Zoning Atlas of the Consolidated Government of Columbus, Georgia, to change certain boundaries of a district located at **1615 Wynnton Road** (parcel # 026-021-004) from Neighborhood Commercial (NC) Zoning District to Residential Multifamily - 1 (RMF1) Zoning District. (Planning Department and PAC recommend approval.) (Councilor Cogle) Councilor Garrett made a motion to adopt the ordinance, seconded by Councilor Crabb and carried unanimously by the six members present, with Councilors Cogle, Huff and Tucker being absent for the vote.
3. **Ordinance (24-023) - 2nd Reading-** REZN-03-24-0502: An Ordinance amending the Zoning Atlas of the Consolidated Government of Columbus, Georgia to change certain boundaries of a district located at **904 Fort Benning Road** (parcel # 064-029-021) from General Commercial (GC) Zoning District to Residential Office (RO) Zoning District. (Planning Department and PAC

recommend approval) (Councilor Huff) Councilor Crabb made a motion to adopt the ordinance, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Allen and carried unanimously by the six members present, with Councilors Cogle, Huff and Tucker being absent for the vote.

4. **Ordinance (24-024) - 2nd Reading-** An ordinance to expand the current boundaries of the Enterprise Zone to include areas as noted in the attached map. (Mayor Pro-Tem) Mayor Pro Tem Allen made a motion to adopt the ordinance, seconded by Councilor Thomas and carried unanimously by the six members present, with Councilors Cogle, Huff and Tucker being absent for the vote.

City Attorney Clifton Fay requested an executive session at the end of the Clerk of Council's Agenda.

NOTE: Councilor Toyia Tucker arrived for the meeting virtually at 9:08 a.m.

PROCLAMATIONS:

5. **Proclamation:** Public Service Recognition Week

Receiving: Sheila Risper, Assistant Human Resources Director, and Laddia King, Human Resources Technician

Councilor Tyson Begly read the proclamation into the record, proclaiming the week of May 6-10, 2024, as *Public Service Recognition Week*, recognizing the dedication of the employees of the Columbus Consolidated Government.

6. **Proclamation:** Professional Municipal Clerks Week

Receiving: Sandra T. Davis, Clerk of Council

Mayor Pro Tem R. Gary Allen read the proclamation into the record, proclaiming the week of May 5-11, 2024, as *Professional Municipal Clerks Week*, and further extend appreciation to our Professional Municipal Clerk, Sandra T. Davis, for the vital services she performs and her exemplary dedication to the communities of Columbus, Georgia for which she represents.

After the reading of the proclamation, **Clerk of Council Sandra T. Davis** remained at the rostrum to offer a final presentation on the recent IIMC Region III Conference that was held in Columbus, Georgia from February 27 - March 1, 2024.

NOTE: Councilor Bruce Huff arrived at 9:15 a.m. and Councilor Joanne Cogle arrived at 9:18 a.m.

PRESENTATION:

7. **MAYOR'S FY2025 BUDGET PRESENTATION:** Mayor Henderson presents the Recommended FY2025 Budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025.

Mayor B. H. “Skip” Henderson presented the FY2025 Recommended Budget and highlighted some of the financial spending plans within the proposed budget to address the needs of our city through strategic planning, priorities and initiatives. The recommended budget is balanced with \$362,324,040 in revenue and expenses. This amount is up 8.39% from our FY2024 Adopted Budget of \$334,293,276. Reserve Funds were utilized to help negate revenue losses resulting from last year’s millage rate reductions. It is fortunate that we have experienced year-over-year increases in our sales tax revenue and we expect this trend to continue into the foreseeable future.

Mayor Henderson also outlined other assumptions that are comprised within this recommended budget; such as, a 2% COLA for all full-time employees and 1% for retirees; the total millage rate remains unchanged; \$100,000 subsidy to Oxbow Creek Golf Course; no subsidy budgeted for Bull Creek Golf Course, the Civic Center Fund or Integrated Waste Fund and a Community Care Fund millage of 2.09 mills remains unchanged to provide service payments for inmates and indigent residents through June 30, 2025. He advised that the General Fund Reserve of \$68.9 million which is about (103.83 days). He explained that he increased the Crime Prevention Grants by \$250,000. from the previous year of \$750,000. to an allocation of \$1 million.

Mayor Henderson referenced the efforts of the late State Representative Richard Smith, who before his passing, had put some money in the state budget for a GBI (Georgia Bureau of Investigations) Office in Columbus with the intention of focusing on gang activity throughout our region. The City of Columbus’ portion is approximately \$200,000 for the first year and we expect to receive that standing in mid-summer or early fall. He also explained there are a number of employees that have been added to this budget throughout the departments with one area of focus being Animal Control with the inclusion of a Communications Tech; this position would be useful in assisting the city in being proactive with our communications. This Recommended Budget also includes a monthly residential fee increase of \$3.00 per month for a total of \$21.00 per month.

In conclusion, **Mayor Henderson** commended and thanked City Manager Hugley, Deputy City Managers Pam Hodge and Lisa Goodwin, Finance Director Angelica Alexander and our elected partners, as well as, thanking the Council in advance for all of the necessary hard work placed before them to review, deliberate and decide upon the final FY2025 Budget.

Budget Chairperson Judy W. Thomas reminded all of the first Budget Review Committee Meeting scheduled for May 7, 2024 at 9:00 a.m. She also outlined the remainder of the Budget Review Committee meeting dates and times.

WORK SESSION AGENDA

I. Early Education System - Dr. David Lewis, Superintendent, Muscogee County School District

MCSD Superintendent Dr. David Lewis approached the rostrum to provide information on the new Pre-K 2 Early Literacy and Numeracy Initiative that is coming to T.H. Brewer Elementary School in August of 2024. Dr. Lewis shared the plan to restructure T.H. Brewer Elementary School to serve the greatest needs in that particular geographic area of our district having economic and social needs. He explained that the Acceleration Center would offer personalized learning in a smaller setting with a 14:1 student to teacher ratio, high quality instructional material and professional learning partnerships. He then outlined the Brewer Acceleration Center enrollment process and the timeline overview.

CCG-TV RENOVATIONS AND EQUIPMENT UPGRADES:

City Manager Isaiah Hugley called upon Mr. Michael King to provide the members of Council with an update on some upcoming equipment upgrades and briefly explained the reason why we would need to relocate the last two meetings in July due to these upgrades. The city is using almost \$800,000 in ARP funding to upgrade the equipment in the Council Chambers.

CCG-TV Station Manager Michael King came forward to explain the need for the upgrade in the Council Chambers. He recalled that we have been using this Council Chambers since 2013. This equipment is worn out and the hardware and software are no longer available for this equipment. He advised that we are going to replace everything to include all ten of the monitors in the Council Chambers. He further explained that we will be replacing the hardware and software that control the microphones, voting equipment and everything that is needed to keep the CCG-TV production going.

II. Tax Allocation Update - Pam Hodge, Deputy City Manager, Finance Planning & Development

Deputy City Manager Pam Hodge came forward to offer a Tax Allocation District update. She then outlined the process for approval of a Tax Allocation District. Once the TAD has been approved, she then explained the process for project applications for funding, which must demonstrate a substantial public benefit. She also explained how the TAD works, TAD Policies and Guidelines, as well as, the Intergovernmental Agreement with the Muscogee County School District. She then made reference to the eight (8) TADs within the City of Columbus.

Deputy City Manager Pam Hodge then provided a chart that displayed each of the eight (8) TADs, the current balance, the FY24 Year-to-date Revenue, the number of projects and the date certified by the Department of Revenue. She provided in details the three Uptown TAD projects; one Midland Commons project and one River District project to include the amount of funding that has been expended to date.

In conclusion, **Deputy City Manager Hodge** advised that, based on the TAD Policies and Guidelines and the Intergovernmental Agreement that the city has with the School District, the two projects that Council is interested in: A.J. McClung Memorial Stadium and the playground in Uptown would need to go through that approval process through the TAD Advisory Committee. She then advised that the Parks & Recreation Director is working on the application for A.J. McClung Memorial Stadium; there is approximately \$1.7 million in that particular TAD District. She said she would reach out to Uptown to work with them on the playground in Uptown.

Councilor Charmaine Crabb requested that Tax Commissioner Lula Huff be added as a member to the TAD Advisory Committee. **Councilor Glenn Davis** suggested that another employee with the city serve as the voting member and turn the Planning Department Director into an ex-officio member.

In response to a question of Councilor Thomas, Deputy City Manager Hodge advised that the three members of the TAD Advisory Committee are outlined in the ordinance to include the Planning Director, Community Reinvestment Director and the Finance Director. Therefore, any changes to the voting members would have to be an amendment to that ordinance.

REFERRALS:

TO THE CITY MANAGER:

- Let's take a look at these territorial boundaries that we have carved out for these TADs, as well as, look at closing out some of these TADs. *(Request of Councilor Davis)*
- Let's determine if the future pickleball complex is located in two different Tax Allocation Districts and advise how that would work, if so. *(Request of Councilor Huff)*
- Provide an update on the 6th Avenue / Liberty District TAD and the potential projects that may spark the interest of developers, who may be willing to bring development opportunities into this area with the use of TAD funding. *(Request of Councilor Huff)*

III. Blight Ordinances - Councilor Tyson Begly

Councilor Tyson Begly provided a presentation on proposed ordinances to address the blight issue in the community. He proceeded with going through each of the sections that contain the proposed amendments and responded to questions from members of Council. He advised that none of the proposed amendments would change any laws that the Tax Commissioner complies with; it would be consistent with the State Law.

1st Ordinance - An ordinance to revise and clarify certain provisions of the Columbus Code which provide for the foreclosure of liens on property for which funds are due and owing to the consolidated government; and for other purposes.

- Sec. 8-85. Demolition costs to become lien against property.

The new language would only change internally by directing our city staff to send it to the Tax Commissioner; so, that she may collect within her role as Tax Commissioner.

In response to a question of Councilor Crabb, **Assistant City Attorney Lucy Sheftall** came forward to explain the purpose of using the word “may” instead of “shall” is because the State Law already directs the Tax Commissioner to do that, but what we wanted was for the Finance Director, in her discretion, to send it to the Tax Commissioner or if there was a more quicker or available way to try to collect on the debt, she could do so.

Tax Commissioner Lula Huff approached the rostrum and explained this is currently happening. She went on to clarify that the Finance Director is doing this now under the nuisance and abatement liens; the Finance Director simply has to notify the Tax Commissioner. She explained that we use the same process to determine which properties we take to tax sales, but this does not expedite the removal of that property and put it back on the tax books. She maintained what expedites it is having more resources in the Tax Commissioner’s Office to have more sales to happen during the course of a year.

With there being no further questions, Councilor Begly proceeded with the remainder of the sections as outlined in the first ordinance.

- Sec. 8-86. Service of complaints, notices, orders.
- Sec. 13-115. - Same—Notice to property occupants and owners; assessment of costs; execution and sale.
- Sec. 13-117. Complaint, hearing, order to abate

After **Clerk of Council Davis** responded to a question of **Councilor Tyson Begly**, he then made the request for the City Attorney’s Office to bring this ordinance on First Reading for the May 14, 2024 Council Meeting.

2nd Ordinance - An ordinance to provide for a levy of increase on ad valorem taxes for blighted property; to provide for identification of blighted property; to provide for remediation; to provide for a decrease on ad valorem taxes on property; and for other purposes.

Councilor Tyson Begly explained that without a blight tax, the city’s only option is to demolish it. This creates a lien on the property; instead of, the city spending that money to demolish it, the current owner would only incur that blight tax, which would create an incentive for the owner to renovate it. This would be a whole lot better than demolishing it.

Tax Commissioner Lula Huff returned to the rostrum to explain this sounds like an easy process; however, it is not. This would be challenging for the Tax Commissioner’s Office.

She went on to explain the difficulties in tracking the property and calculating the new millage rate that is only applicable to that particular property, which would impact the time frame to get the digest out.

Mayor Henderson suggested that Councilor Begly, Tax Commissioner Lula Huff and the other staff members involved in drafting the blight ordinance get together to discuss it.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Mayor Henderson entertained a motion to go into executive session to discuss matters of potential litigation as requested by City Attorney Fay earlier in the meeting. Councilor Thomas made a motion to go into Executive Session, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Allen and carried unanimously by the seven members present, with Councilors Davis and Huff being absent for the vote, and the time being 12:56 p.m. (*Councilor Tucker cast her vote in the affirmative.*)

The Regular Meeting reconvened at 1:38 p.m., at which time, Mayor Henderson announced that the Council did meet in executive session to discuss matters of potential litigation; however, there were no votes taken.

With there being no further business to discuss, Mayor Henderson entertained a motion for adjournment. Motion by Councilor Garrett to adjourn the April 30, 2024 Consent Agenda/Work Session, seconded by Councilor Crabb and carried unanimously by the nine members present, with the time being 1:39 p.m. (*Councilor Tucker cast her vote in the affirmative.*)

Sandra T. Davis, CMC
Clerk of Council
Council of Columbus, Georgia