

**REGULAR MEETING, MAYOR AND COUNCIL, CITY OF COVINGTON,
GEORGIA, COUNCIL ROOM, JANUARY 2, 2024, 6:30 PM.**

Mayor Fleeta Baggett presided with Mayor Pro-tem Anthony Henderson, Council members: Susie Keck, Charika Davis, Kimberly Johnson, Travis Moore, and Jared Rutberg, City Manager Tres Thomas, Deputy City Manager John King, City Clerk Audra M. Gutierrez, Deputy Clerk Amanda Huggins, and City Attorney Frank Turner, Jr. present.

Mayor Baggett's niece, Ashley Smith, gave the invocation.

Mayor Baggett gave led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

Mayor Baggett read a proclamation acknowledging the passing of former Mayor Steve Horton's mother, Mrs. Illa Mae Horton.

Mayor Baggett administered the oath of office to new CPD Officers Dominique Dunn and Wentz Obei.

1. Motion made by Council member Keck, seconded by Council member Rutberg to approve the minutes from the Regular Council Meeting held on December 11, 2023.

Motion carried unanimously.

2. Motion made by Council member Davis, seconded by Council member Rutberg to remove Item 3 on the agenda, "Re-discussion of request by the Community Development Department for the addition of a Special Events Coordinator position to its current staff, along with budget adjustment resolution", until further discussion with Community Development Director Ken Malcom.

Motion carried unanimously.

3. Motion made by Council member Keck, seconded by Council member Rutberg to approve a license to sell alcoholic beverages for **off-premises consumption** only for:

Walgreens #13760

3188 Hwy 278, NE

Motion carried unanimously.

4. Motion made by Council member Keck, seconded by Council member Rutberg to approve the re-appointment of Heather King to the Historic Preservation Commission.

Motion carried unanimously.

5. Motion made by Council member Keck, seconded by Council member Rutberg to approve the re-appointment of John Conklin to the Historic Preservation Commission.

Motion carried unanimously.

6. Motion made by Council member Keck, seconded by Council member Rutberg to approve the re-appointment of Janet Goodman to the Historic Preservation Commission.

Motion carried unanimously.

7. Motion made by Council member Keck, seconded by Council member Rutberg to approve the re-appointment of Bess Dobbs to the Tree Preservation Board.

Motion carried unanimously.

8. Motion made by Council member Keck, seconded by Council member Rutberg to approve the re-appointment of Lekeisha M. Thurman to the Tree Preservation Board.

Motion carried unanimously.

9. Motion made by Council member Davis, seconded by Council member Rutberg to approve a State of Georgia's Revocable License Agreement to the City of Covington at the Newton Campus of the Georgia Piedmont Technical College for the purpose of the construction of underground electrical distribution lines.

Motion carried unanimously.

10. Motion made by Council member Moore, seconded by Council member Rutberg to approve the appointment of Frank Turner, Jr. as City Attorney (with assistance from Greer, Stansfield & Turner, LLP if needed), Qader A. Baig as Municipal Court Judge, and Piedmont Physicians as City Physicians.

Motion carried unanimously.

11. Motion made by Council member Davis, seconded by Council member Moore to approve the appointment of Susie Keck as Mayor Pro-tem.

Motion carried unanimously.

12. Motion made by Council member Rutberg, seconded by Council member Moore to approve the appointment of Kim Johnson as Mayor Pro-tem Elect.

Motion carried unanimously.

Comments from the City Manager:

- Happy New Year!
- Looking forward to working with everyone in 2024
- Covington Town Center/Exit 92 on I-20 tree planting beautification project is complete

Deputy City Manager John King wished everyone a Happy New Year, stated he looks forward to working with everyone.

Council member Keck wished everyone a Happy New Year and stated she is excited about 2024.

Council member Johnson wished everyone a Happy New Year and stated she is excited to serve.

Council member Moore wished everyone a Happy New Year stated he was excited. Council member Moore questioned when the Special Events Coordinator discussion would occur.

Mayor Baggett stated once a work session is scheduled to discuss, the item can then be addressed, and this shall occur soon.

Council member Davis wished everyone a Happy New Year and asked about developers doing work on the West Street apartments. Council member Davis further stated she would like to know the process regarding the monitoring of permits for developments.

City Manager Tres Thomas stated the developer of the West Street apartments currently has a stop work order until there is additional documentation received by the Planning and Zoning department, and a review is completed. Mr. Thomas further stated anytime there is illegal activity regarding work on developments without permits Code Enforcement performs an investigation and issues stop work orders if needed.

Planning and Zoning Director Judy Johnson stated Code Enforcement performs pro-active sweeps, and the building being referenced by Council member Davis at Bohannon Street has a remodel building permit. Ms. Johnson stated there was a stop work order placed on the garage, and there were two other builders found performing unpermitted work in this area also.

Council member Henderson entered the meeting at 6:54 PM.

Council member Davis questioned if the City plans to re-apply for the CHIP grant and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), and if the new Grant Coordinator is working on the youth homelessness grant.

City Manager Tres Thomas stated the CHIP grant and CDBG application process is extremely thorough, and extra staff may be needed to implement the process. Mr. Thomas stated the City should be ready to apply for the CHIP grant in 2025 per recommendation from the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC), is working with the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), and trying to locate past applications.

Council member Davis stated she does not think grants should be pushed off until 2025, and it appears the City does not care about poor people by not seeking grant money.

Deputy City Manager John King stated the City does not meet certain criteria listed for the youth homelessness grant, such as a youth advisory board.

City Manager Tres Thomas stated the Grant Coordinator has attended training and seminars to prepare for better success rates in grant awards.

Council member Davis stated she was not clear if a decision regarding streetlights at Stone Mountain Street was made through email.

Mayor Baggett stated that since there is plenty of lighting on Stone Mountain Street and the property is private, consensus was not to place the streetlight. Mayor Baggett further stated more lighting near the trail behind the gas station would encourage people to be on the trail at night, which is not supposed to happen.

Council member Henderson questioned if Council can vote by email and stated he was unclear on why the City pole was removed to light said area. Council member Henderson stated he does not want the issue to become personal, and thinks the property needs lighting.

City Attorney Frank Turner Jr. explained taking a consensus through email with no voting may take place.

Mayor Baggett stated the City cannot set precedence by placing City poles on private property, and the trail cannot have lighting at night encouraging foot traffic.

Council member Davis stated she would like discussion and a vote on the streetlight issue, and not everyone prefers email as a communication method.

Council member Rutberg wished everyone a Happy New Year, and stated he wanted to commend the utilities department on the effective streetlights. Council member Rutberg further stated he would like a staffing update from Police Chief Bradford, particularly in regards to upcoming development.

Chief Bradford stated there are currently 61 sworn officers, with a need of 70 officers, and a projected need of 83 officers based on a 2021 study conducted. Chief Bradford stated it takes a total of approximately eight months to get an officer hired and on patrol.

Mayor Baggett stated she wanted to stress her desire for everyone to work well together, as the last Mayor and Council went through many ups and downs. Mayor Baggett further stated there will be some work sessions scheduled and she would like all Council in attendance in order to get to know each other better and get through the learning curve. Mayor Baggett stressed to Council the biggest components are going into meetings well prepared, staying on a straight path, and communicating well to get things done quickly and efficiently for the citizens of Covington. Mayor Baggett stated she looks forward to the next four years.

13. Motion made by Council member Moore, seconded by Council member Rutberg to enter into Executive Session at 7:13 PM for the purpose of discussing litigation.

Motion carried unanimously.

14. Motion made by Council member Davis, seconded by Council member Moore to enter into Regular Session.

Motion carried unanimously.

Being no further business meeting adjourned at 7:24 PM.

Fleeta Baggett, Mayor

Audra M. Gutierrez, City Clerk