

REGULAR MEETING, MAYOR AND COUNCIL, CITY OF COVINGTON, GEORGIA, COUNCIL ROOM, APRIL 15, 2024, 6:30 PM.

Mayor Fleeta Baggett presided with Mayor Pro-tem Susie Keck, Council members: Anthony Henderson, 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.

Ms. Barbara Collins gave the invocation.

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

Mayor Baggett administered the Oath of Office to new Covington Police officer Jonathan Bruce.

Chief Philip Bradford introduced new Assistant Police Chief Brent Fuesting and recognized promotion of Captain Gene Nuqui.

Chief Bradford and Captain Nuqui presented Certificates of Completion to graduates of the Covington Police Department Citizens Academy.

1. Motion made by Council member Keck, seconded by Council member Henderson to approve the minutes from the Regular Council Meeting held on April 1, 2024.

Motion carried unanimously.

2. Motion made by Council member Rutberg, seconded by Council member Henderson to approve a **final** reading of an ordinance for the City of Covington,

“AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF COVINGTON, GEORGIA, TO AMEND THE COVINGTON MUNICIPAL CODE, ENACTED AND ADOPTED ON THE 16TH DAY OF OCTOBER, 2001, AS AMENDED BY PREVIOUS AMENDMENTS, TO ALTER CERTAIN PROVISION OF TITLE 13 OF THE SAID CODE OF ORDINANCES FOR THE PURPOSE OF **AMENDING SECTION 13.08.340 (ELECTRIC VEHICLE FAST CHARGING TARIFF)** OF CHAPTER 13.08 (ELECTRIC SYSTEM) THEREOF, TO REPEAL CONFLICTING ORDINANCES AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.”

Motion carried with Council members Keck, Johnson, Moore, Rutberg, and Henderson voting in favor. Council member Davis voting in opposition.

3. Motion made by Council member Johnson, seconded by Council member Moore to approve a **final** reading of an ordinance for the City of Covington,

“AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF COVINGTON, GEORGIA, TO AMEND THE COVINGTON MUNICIPAL CODE, ENACTED AND ADOPTED ON THE 16TH DAY OF OCTOBER, 2001, AS AMENDED BY PREVIOUS AMENDMENTS, TO ALTER CERTAIN PROVISION OF TITLE 13 OF THE SAID CODE OF ORDINANCES FOR THE PURPOSE OF **AMENDING SECTION 13.12.090 (FEES AND RATES)** OF CHAPTER 13.12 (WATER SYSTEM) THEREOF, TO REPEAL CONFLICTING ORDINANCES AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.”

Motion carried with Council members Keck, Johnson, Moore, and Rutberg voting in favor. Council members Davis and Henderson voting in opposition.

Loucy Hay introduced Gail Rothman, Director of the Newton Education Foundation, and explained education foundations as well as a draft joint proclamation between county government entities regarding “ALL IN FOR KIDS” to re-launch the Newton Education Foundation.

4. Motion made by Council member Rutberg, seconded by Council member Moore to remove Item 7c from the agenda, *“Nomination and appointment of Dania Bernard to the Covington Planning Commission to fill unexpired term of Callie Carter Whitworth, and term expiration of July 1, 2026.”*

Motion carried unanimously.

5. Motion made by Council member Rutberg, seconded by Council member Moore to remove Item 7d from the agenda, *“Nomination and appointment of Jennifer Lathrop to the Covington Board of Appeals and Adjustments.”*

Motion carried unanimously.

6. Motion made by Council member Rutberg, seconded by Council member Moore to remove Item 18 from the agenda, *“Enter into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing land.”*

Motion carried unanimously.

7. Motion made by Council member Davis, seconded by Council member Henderson to approve a license to sell alcoholic beverages for **on-premises consumption** only for:

The Depot Sports Bar & Grill

4122 Emory Street, NW

Motion carried unanimously.

8. Motion made by Council member Davis, seconded by Council member Henderson to approve a license to sell alcoholic beverages for **Beer and/or Wine Retail Amenity** only for:

Southern Heartland Art Gallery

1132 Monticello Street, SW

Motion carried unanimously.

9. Motion made by Council member Johnson, seconded by Council member Henderson to approve a **first** reading of an ordinance for the City of Covington,

“AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF COVINGTON, GEORGIA, TO AMEND THE COVINGTON MUNICIPAL CODE, ENACTED AND ADOPTED ON THE 16TH DAY OF OCTOBER, 2001, AS AMENDED BY PREVIOUS AMENDMENTS, TO ALTER CERTAIN PROVISION OF TITLE 8 OF THE SAID CODE OF ORDINANCES FOR THE PURPOSE OF **AMENDING CHAPTER 8.24 (UNFIT BUILDINGS)** THERETO, TO REPEAL CONFLICTING ORDINANCES AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.”

Motion carried unanimously.

10. Motion made by Council member Moore, seconded by Council member Keck to approve an additional cost of \$91,400.00 to the existing contract with RJDE, Inc. for the Manhole Rehabilitation Project that will not exceed the \$1.5 million budgeted amount for the contract in order to replace 420 feet of sewer pipe.

Motion carried unanimously.

11. Motion made by Council member Henderson, seconded by Council member Rutberg to approve request of 2024-2025 Cyber Security insurance renewal and premium amount of \$42,762.72 with Travelers Excess as discussed by insurance agent Gary Massey Inc. to begin May 1, 2024.

Motion carried unanimously.

12. Motion made by Council member Rutberg, seconded by Council member Henderson to approve the request of the Hwy 278 Community Improvement District (CID) and submit application for 2024 TIP Solicitation Grant for the final piece of funding regarding the Phase I-Hwy 278 Master Plan, along with accompanying resolution.

Motion carried with Council members Keck, Johnson, Moore, Rutberg, and Henderson voting in favor. Council member Davis voting in opposition.

13. Motion made by Council member Henderson, seconded by Council member Keck to approve a change order cost of \$36,990.00 to Ross + Associates in order to add a Parks and Recreation component to the current impact fee program and include:

- Central Park pavilions, bathrooms, skate park, mountain bike trail, gateways, bridges, and playground equipment
- Academy Springs Park bathrooms, upgraded playground equipment, landscaping and pond improvements
- Park at Covington Mill
- Pocket park at Brown Bridge Crossing
- Bike lanes throughout the City along roads
- Cricket Frog Trail tie-ins and crossing signals
- Multi-use trails to be incorporated into the Turner Lake Rd project and the Hwy 278 CID project
- Conyers Street Gym/Bakers Field improvements

Motion carried unanimously.

14. Motion made by Council member Davis, seconded by Council member Henderson to approve the submission of an application for Rural Zone Program designation.

Motion carried unanimously.

15. Motion made by Council member Keck, seconded by Council member Johnson to approve the Real Estate Purchase Agreement between City of Covington and Charles Christian Tuller House Inc. regarding a purchase of property at 3156 Spring Street containing 1.7 acres for \$100,000.00, including \$5,000.00 earnest money for a 90-day inspection period.

Motion carried with Council members Keck, Johnson, Moore, and Rutberg voting in favor. Council members Davis and Henderson voting in opposition.

Thelma Nolley stated 3156 Spring Street is in her neighborhood and she would like to know what the City plans to do with it. Mayor Baggett stated currently it is unknown exactly what the City plans are for the property, but there are several suggestions such as a community center providing education mainly for the homeless population and as space for a warming shelter during cold months. Mayor Baggett reinforced it would be used as a warming shelter and not a homeless shelter. Ms. Nolley stated she is in strong opposition as there are many senior citizens and children in the neighborhood and the citizens need an opportunity to express concerns before this plan happens. Mayor Baggett stated there will definitely be community discussion before anything final is decided. Ms. Nolley stated citizens around Lester Lackey & Sons Funeral Home were upset that an event was blocking their driveway and closing a street without their knowledge.

Comments from the City Manager:

- Happy Tax Day
- National Public Safety Telecommunications Week, thank you to our 911 Communications Center for all you do

Council member Keck stated there is a great article in the Newton Magazine about our 911 Center. Council member Keck further stated she saw what was taking place at Lily and Sparrow by Lester Lackey & Sons Funeral Home referenced by Ms. Nolley and is confused, as the driveway does not come out by Lily and Sparrow where the event was held. Council member Keck stated she attended the event, and would like to address concerns with Ms. Nolley after the meeting. Council member Keck reminded everyone about Concert for a Cause Saturday night, April 20, 2024, at Legion Field, sponsored by Piedmont Newton Hospital, and she will have a table decorated.

Council member Johnson stated a pedestrian crossing light is out of position at Emory and Clark Street. Council member Johnson questioned if there could be a CID project to enhance Washington Street coming out of the Square. Council member Johnson thanked Community Development and Tourism Director Ken Malcom for a great night of Glow Golf Par-Tee golf held on the Square over the weekend. Council member Johnson further stated she met with KCVC Operations Supervisor Adam Webb at the Covington Municipal Airport as well as Police Chief Philip Bradford and was very impressed at the work of both. Council member Johnson stated the police training gun range needs improvements. Council member Johnson reminded everyone the Housing Authority is accepting applications on May 1, 2024 beginning at midnight online for one-bedroom apartments.

Kathy Morgan of the CID stated it is in discussion, and she will meet with Council member Johnson to provide more details.

Council member Moore stated he also toured the Covington Municipal Airport and great things are happening. Council member Moore further stated he visited the Water Resource Facility, and spent time with Police Chief Philip Bradford and Public Works Director Lee Harvey, all of which are doing a great job.

Council member Davis stated she, along with other Council members, received many phone calls regarding eighteen-wheeled trucks going through the Square and would like this addressed, as it is understood that GPS is routing the drivers through the Square. Council member Davis further stated she received a text from a citizen very unhappy about taxes going up, and that there is still an issue with slow internet in the Sandhill area. Council member Davis stated there were two funerals at Lester Lackey and Sons Funeral Home and, with Reynolds Street blocked, many upset citizens as the situation could have resulted in much worse. Council member Davis stated she would like more insight on how road closures work in the City.

Council member Rutberg stated he would like an update regarding the Floyd Street/East Street Bulb-out Project, the Square repair, and the Turner Lake Road Improvements Project. Council member Rutberg thanked KCVC Operations Supervisor Adam Webb and Chief Bradford for tours, and Ken Malcom for the Glow Golf Par-Tee event. Council member Rutberg stated he attended a concert in Athens, GA over the weekend and five women at the concert were staying in Covington from Connecticut, and while participating in Glow Golf Par-Tee on Friday they were in Athens on Saturday spending money. Council member Rutberg further stated he would like to see visitors spending all their time and money in Covington during their stay.

City Manager Tres Thomas stated the Turner Lake Road project is a marathon and with new construction added the project may begin in Spring or mid-2026. Mr. Thomas stated the final design of the Bulb-out project is complete and to be advertised in mid-June 2024 with an estimated six month completion time or less. Mr. Thomas stated the design and contract documents are prepared and ready for advertisement for the Square improvements, but the placement of underground power as discussed the April 1, 2024 Council meeting will be very expensive. Mr. Thomas stated he will have estimates for underground power placement at the May 6, 2024 Council meeting.

Council member Henderson stated he also received a phone call regarding the blocked funeral home and the owner stated he usually receives a letter when there will be closures but he did not this time. Council member Henderson further stated he will be meeting with State Representatives to try and find a way to assist with affordable senior housing, as he is receiving calls regarding rent increase by hundreds of dollars in some of our senior communities.

Community Development and Tourism Director Ken Malcom stated the event, a farmer's market, was discussed with neighboring businesses and that the occurrence would be twice annually. Mr. Malcom stated it was confirmed the Monday before the event that there would be no interference with business of the funeral home, and that one funeral would be held off-site. Mr. Malcom stated it was made clear to the sponsors of the event that the funeral home must have no interference, and that there may be funerals needed at any time, in which "Plan B" must be utilized by the sponsor. Mr. Malcom stated he will make certain something like this does not happen again.

Mayor Baggett stated the cost of rent is a horrible problem and starting conversation with State Representatives is a start. Mayor Baggett reminded Council that Board and Committee appointments are to be made at the May 6, 2024 Council meeting and to gather resumes by May 1, 2024 for review at the May 6, 2024 work session. Mayor Baggett thanked the Newton County Sherriff's Office for the invitation to the awards ceremony. Mayor Baggett asked everyone to be grateful for our public safety and 911 Communications workers.

Being no further business meeting adjourned at 7:37 PM.

Fleeta S. Baggett, Mayor

Audra M. Gutierrez, City Clerk