

The regular meeting of the Hammond Common Council of the City of Hammond, Lake County, Indiana was held on December 30, 2024 in the Hammond City Council Chambers and was available to be viewed at gohammond on Facebook, gohammond.tv live and per Zoom.

Council President Scott Rakos presided.

Council Coordinator Carmen I. Balboa facilitated.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was recited by all.

Invocation by Councilwoman Alexander

#### ROLL CALL

PHYSICALLY PRESENT: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Tyler, Emerson, Woerpel, Rakos

ELECTRONICALLY PRESENT PER ZOOM: Salinas

ABSENT: None

TOTAL: 9

#### MAYOR'S ADDRESS

Mayor McDermott- Good to see you all for the rare December 30<sup>th</sup> meeting. I wanted to start off and talk about something that happened in Robertsdale last week. I was speaking to Councilman Mark about this shortly before the meeting. I just wanted to start off and talk about it. It was the day after Christmas in Robertsdale, when residents started flooding City Hall with phone calls about, I wanna say a bad odor but that is understating it greatly, it was an overwhelming odor of gas. It smelled like it was about to blow up. It covered pretty much the entire area over around Amoco Park, all that part of Robertsdale, Lost Marsh Golf Course. It came from Whiting, the Tank Farm, located just to the west of Amoco Park. BP suffered a leak, technically in the City of Whiting, although I talked to Mayor Spebar during this, Mayor Spebar wasn't getting any information from BP whatsoever. The City of Hammond was getting no information whatsoever. The Hammond Fire Department was getting no information from BP whatsoever. Hammond Department of Environmental Management was getting no information from BP whatsoever. We asked for paperwork for the odor that was permeating the entire first district and all of Whiting, and we were told we would get it later in the day, and it took them 4 days to get us the MSDS paperwork which is completely unacceptable. You know BP is not communicating when they have emergency situations. They're not communicating with first responders in Hammond. They're not even communicating with first responders in Whiting and that's their host community. I want the residents to know that it's not for lack of trying. We are ringing their phone off the hook through multiple different departments and we are getting no response. It's unacceptable what is going on and I don't know what we have to do short of litigation to get BP to stop stinking up and stop odoring up the 1<sup>st</sup> District and Northwest Indiana in general. Councilman Mark, I know this is a big deal, so I don't know if you wanna say anything.

Councilman Kalwinski- A really big deal, the day after Christmas. People are home trying to enjoy family and the smell got in the house. People were having physical reactions to it, they were coughing, they felt nauseous some of them. It was throughout the Goose Island area, like you said, around Amoco Park and into Whiting, and before the wind shifted, it was coming into my neighborhood even further south. Then the wind shifted, and we didn't have much of that after that. People were calling and asking, well what's the City's response? What do we know? They're concerned for their health and safety and nobody had any answers. The question came up,

*Prepared by  
Robert J. Golec  
Hammond City Clerk*

## MAYOR'S ADDRESS cont

Councilman Kalwinski cont-about how did BP find out about this? Was it through the calls made by residents to 911? Or did BP come out before that with some sort of announcement? Clearly it looks like it was because of the residents calls to 911 and the Fire Department investigating and coming up with trying to get answers from BP and like you said, they weren't forthcoming and they weren't fast. It wasn't in real time. We didn't know our emergency service workers were out there in that and they didn't know what they were breathing. They were at risk, not only the people who were in their homes or going to church or whatever at risk, but our emergency responders are first in line and there's concern about that. I have great concern about all of them. The responders need to be taken care of and BP doesn't seem to care about that. They come out with announcements when they're ready, meanwhile, like you said, we didn't get the report for 4 days and what are we breathing? Is it toxic? Our emergency workers need to go to the houses and do a write up in the computer and BP has to tell us what they're breathing so when they go to the ER, they know what they're dealing with in the ER and we don't get that. It's not timely enough. It's just not timely enough. It's not responsible.

Mayor McDermott- Coming on the heels of the flare up that they had in like February or March, same kind of response BP had during that. No information at all and after the flare up BP went around and did their rounds in the City of Hammond. I'm sure they did it with all the local elected officials and said, we're tightening up, we're never gonna do this type of stuff again and then during the leak last week, total silence, total stonewall, not even talking to first responders. This is completely, completely unacceptable. I just want to acknowledge it happened. It was horrifying. It smelled for 24 solid hours. We're sending a strongly worded letter to BP, I don't know what else to do outside of litigation.

Councilman Kalwinski- BPP mentioned they were monitoring the spill and that it was safe. Do we rely totally on what BP tells us? Is there a second source of information with more timely information about what we're breathing and what actions we should take because it could be toxic? We can't rely on them, clearly. They don't tell us in a timely manner what is happening in our neighborhoods.

Mayor McDermott- Thank you, Councilman. To the residents of Robertsdale, I apologize. I promise to follow this up. I followed the last one up. BP told us they tightened up, but obviously that is not the case. We will follow up. I will keep the Council informed.

Councilman Kalwinski- I appreciate you being out there because I know you came out there with Environmental and with 911 investigating. So on your day off too, just like everybody else, you were out there as I was, so thank you for that.

Mayor McDermott- It smelled so much, it was like you could feel it. It was very intense and scary. Anyway Council, I know you know this, I just want to point out, it's the end of the year. This is the last Council Meeting of the year. We have 3 things that must pass tonight, well must be voted on. If they get shot down, they get shot down. I would never presume to tell the Council what they're doing, but we have ARPA 4.0 facing you all. That's an end of year deadline. I know Megan's concerned and she's here making sure this goes well. I know we've talked about it a lot, I just wanna point that out. Elected Official Salary Ordinance, must be done tonight as well as Police and Fire Salary Ordinance, and the Civil City Salary Ordinance. So I'm gonna give you an update on where we are. Last meeting I updated you that the Fire Department rejected the Merritt System and I told you that Police was voting on it. Police Department rejected to Merritt System as well, so thank you,

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Robert J. Golec  
Hammond City Clerk*

## MAYOR'S ADDRESS cont.

Mayor McDermott cont- Council. I know that Police and Fire are very happy that you gave them the choice about what kind of department to work for. So they did shoot it down like we anticipated they may. Police Department negotiations are completed. We signed the contracts. We held a ceremony. Fire Department contracts are completed, we have not officially signed the contract. We are planning a ceremony for last I heard, this Friday. I think everything is wrapped up, not even I think. Everything is wrapped up except for the Public Ceremony part. Teamsters, we have the Water Department Teamsters signed. We have the Sanitary District Teamsters signed. Public Works Teamsters shot down their deal which was an interesting wrinkle on like December 20<sup>th</sup>. Obviously that was late in the game, they shot down their deal, so we are going to regroup next week after the 1<sup>st</sup> of January and see if we can patch it together. This has happened before. I have been Mayor for a long time as you all know. We have had situations where unions don't have their, well the union and the city don't have their deal put together by the end of the year. What we do in cases like that is carry forward the union contract. They're still union, we still recognize them, they still have bargaining unit. They still have the rules applied to the union contract. I look at it as year 5 of a 4 year deal. It's not wonderful, but we anticipate knocking it out soon. I'm surprised they shot it down, being honest with you. I'm really surprised they shot it down because everybody else approved it and thought it was a good deal. So we're gonna finish that up next week. I imagine by the next Council Meeting, I'll have good news on that front as well and if I don't have good news, it will be very bad news, how bout that. I imagine the next Council Meeting, hopefully we'll have good news. Activity log, public signing ceremony with the Hammond FOP. Our cops are real happy. It's wonderful, Thank God. Hopefully we'll stop losing them and we can stabilize the force. Monthly meeting with Hammond Firefighters went well. We held it with shift 3 in the Central Firehouse. We filled a Hospitality Manager Position with the Jean Shepherd Center with Tabitha Dempsey. Tabitha came from the Sportsplex Hospitality. Tabitha and I actually just went to visit the Jean Shepherd Center right before I got here. They built basically, it's a restaurant, but it's really like a bar, it's really nice. If you haven't been to the Jean, it's worth checking out. They've done a really good job. They built like a new restaurant in the Jean Shepherd Center, and I can see that in the summer time, it's gonna be a popular spot, right off the lake there. We're talking about building a little boardwalk out there off the lake, it's really cool. So if you get a chance, even if you're not a pickleball player, They have good food, and good drinks, all the TVs with all the games on. Real Cool.

Councilman Kalwinski- Courts are real nice. They're full a lot of the time during open play. People come from Illinois, somebody came from Michigan, Valparaiso, Chesterton, as I'm talking to people. They're drawing from everywhere.

Mayor McDermott- I appreciate that Councilman Mark. I know you just did in Pulaski Park, you got pickleball courts there as well. It's something that's really taking off. I'm glad we did that at the Jean. Met with outside educational institute about opportunities they see in the City of Hammond with a particular piece of property. I've always thought differently about this piece of property. We have interested companies from Illinois looking at this property too. It's an interesting situation given what's going on with our schools in Hammond. Should we try to help out with the education system or do we keep doing our job bringing in business. So we're having a little dilemma. It's about a piece of property in the 2<sup>nd</sup> District. I want to talk to Councilman Al more about that when I get a chance. Obviously I wanna talk to you all as well to see where you stand on the issue. It's an interesting opportunity for us. Met with the CEO and Superintendent of Hammond Water about that mass letter that went out about lead, lead lines, I was really not pleased that that letter went out. It was forced on us by US EPA, but we all should have known about it first. Me and you all so that when we start getting the phone calls from our residents, we know what they're talking about, and that didn't go down, so we talked to the Water

*Prepared by  
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## MAYOR'S ADDRESS cont.

Mayor McDermott cont-Department about that. I promise you we will get better in the future about that. Met with multiple candidates from the Hammond Fire Department interested in the open Assistant Fire Chief position. That position was filled with former Battalion Chief Chris Trtan. Chris Trtan's a great Hammond Firefighter. He's been with the city for 32 years. He is now acting as Assistant Fire Chief, doing a good job. We have an open Battalion Chief position, we're interviewing for that as we speak. Held Staff retreat for all the Department Heads, and number 2's. Staff Retreat is once a year basically, maybe twice a year. We do it in the 1<sup>st</sup> District, up in Robertsdale in the Clipper Room. That was an all day event, 4 hours. It was really good getting all the employees back on the same page. Then we had our employee Christmas party that night. I want to thank a lot of the Council people that showed up. We had literally had like 400-500 people at the employee Christmas Party. That's good for morale. Met with the CEO of the Southshore Convention and Visitors Bureau in regards to a project we're working on with the Little Calumet River Basin Authority. I've been talking to Councilman Woerpel about this project. It's an interesting proposal that Phil Taillon and the SSCVB is talking about doing over there. It's an interesting opportunity for us. Met with the Festival of the Lakes team to discuss sponsorship opportunities for the 2025 Fest. Met with the Director of Government Affairs of NIPSCO in regards to Data Centers and power needs. This is something we're all gonna have to start getting involved in. It is the power that is gonna start powering these Data Centers. We are blessed in Hammond that we have the infrastructure, but it still costs a lot of money. We're blessed in Hammond because you read about these Data Centers that are going in these small towns, no they're not. These Data Centers that we're talking about in Hammond, takes enough power to power 3 steel mills. So if you don't have the NIPSCO capability to power 3 steel mills. Like Chesterton? You're not getting a Data Center. You need like the infrastructure from NIPSCO to support these things and that's one thing we're blessed with here in Hammond, thankfully. It's all I got for my report. I'm sure there's questions.

Councilman Woerpel- Mayor, you brought up the Shepherd Center and the pickleball courts and I've never seen anything like it. I mean, being an old guy, it's kinda like playing ping pong on top of the table if you ask me from what I seen. That place was packed non stop except there's a lull there during the day when people are working, but it's beautiful. I commend your Park Department and yourself for bringing that in there and that grill and bar in there is the perfect thing for it. I've gotten a lot of people that are really impressed with that over there.

Mayor McDermott- Thank you, Councilman.

Councilman Woerpel- also the improvements to the park, thanks to the Engineering department and the CIB, we got a bunch of dirt and stuff over there to level off that field and add to the snow hill. It really wasn't any cost to the residents. In fact I think we saved \$300,000 or something like that by using that. Just wanted to commend you and the staff and the Park Department.

Mayor McDermott- We appreciate it. Yeah, it looks really nice over there, Councilman, thanks. Right before I left there was like 150 people over there playing pickleball. I'm sitting there and I came over here with you all. In that place if we got 150 people in 3 days before we turned it into pickleball, it would have been a big 3 days. That place is night and day. I wanna thank Jim Taillon who has moved his office over there basically to help get it off the ground. So he's doing a real good job.

Councilman Woerpel- and just so everyone knows, the walking track still exists, the workout room still exists,

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Robert J. Golec  
Hammond City Clerk*

MAYOR'S ADDRESS cont.

Councilman Woerpel cont- so we didn't lose nothing other than a few empty basketball courts.

Mayor McDermott- Thank you all, it was good to see you.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Councilman Woerpel, supported by Councilman Emerson, moved to approve the minutes of December 9, 2024 and place on file. AYES: ALL

APPROVAL OF CLAIMS

Councilwoman Venecz, supported by Councilman Woerpel, moved to approve the claims from December 16, 2024 through December 23, 2024. Claim #10681 through #10927, inclusive. In the amount of \$7,646,166.35.

ROLL CALL VOTE (Claims)

AYES: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Salinas, Tyler, Emerson, Woerpel, Rakos

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion Carried

9/0/0

CLAIMS APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARINGS

24-33 An Ordinance to Further Appropriate from the ARPA Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund for Purposes that Fulfill the Intent of the American Rescue Plan Act (Version 4.0)

Council President Rakos- Anybody would like to speak specifically to ordinance 24-33, regarding the ARP Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund? Anybody like to speak on ARPA Coronavirus? Going once, going twice, Public Hearing is closed.

COMMUNICATIONS

Councilman Woerpel- We all received a communication from the Law Department, I guess it would be an amendment to the signed ordinance that we're gonna pass tonight and in caucus, we agreed that we're gonna just deal with it separately in the near future. It was just an add on wasn't it? A one way street.

Council President Rakos- I'd like to make an announcement from HC3. We had Knuckleheads and HC3 had another Christmas give back on December 23<sup>rd</sup>. It was very well attended. We had families all the way from 4500 Pine, all the way down to 7700 Rhode Island and everywhere in between. I wanna special thanks, Optimist Club who is our big sponsor, HC3, also, Councilman Spitale was our biggest donor on the Council, Councilwoman Alexander and Councilwoman Venecz. It's an amazing thing. They always, Dustin Voris, he always takes so much planning, and we always have extra toys specifically for when we're at a house, that was given to us by the School City, and when there's neighbors, kids are checking out the window, we have Santa take them to them. It's always been a really good thing. Thank you all for supporting.

*Prepared by  
Robert J. Golec  
Hammond City Clerk*



ORDINANCE 3<sup>RD</sup> READING- FINAL PASSAGE cont.

Councilman Woerpel- To answer Mr. Stoya's question, this pertains to appropriating the funds that have to be appropriated by the end of 2024 from the ARPA plan. I believe it's roughly around \$300,000. I know part of it's going to go to IT upgrades and the rest is for miscellaneous funds as needed as far as tipping fees, sanitary fees.

Mayor McDermott- Just to clarify, after ARPA 3.0 passed at the end of '23, beginning of '24, there was a small unallocated balance of \$371,000 basically remaining. Controller's Office recommends using \$270,000 for server upgrades needed by the IT department of which there is no funding source. Any remaining unallocated funds will be generally be allocated for recycling, landfill overlays to cover general cost overruns on these issues in our appropriate uses under ARPA. So this money needs to be allocated by the end of 2024 and here we are at the end of 2024, and spent by the end of 2026. Whatever's leftover after IT upgrades, we will just use for permissible uses that we have in our budget.

ROLL CALL VOTE (passage)

AYES: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Salinas, Tyler, Emerson, Woerpel, Rakos

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried

9/0/0

ORDINANCE NO. 9657 PASSED

Mayor McDermott- I just want to say thank you to the Council. This wraps up our ARPA tour. We had \$55 million dollars given to our city by ARPA and we came up with a way to spend it in all 6 of our districts and we did it without fighting and we did it without gridlock, and I just want to say thank you to the Council. There's a lot of cities that the ARPA money was the beginning of the end for them. They all went to war. I just want to say thank you to the Council, thank you to the Controller's Office, thank you to everybody, the CIB that came up with a list of projects. I think it was a good list, and we did good work. I appreciate it, and that's the last thing we have to do for ARPA, so thank you to the Council. Thank you to Congressman Mrvan, to President Biden, everybody that made it possible because we did a lot of good work with it, so thank you.

24-34            An Ordinance of the Common Council of the City of Hammond Authorizing the City of Hammond, Indiana, to Issue One or More Series of Its Economic Development Revenue Bonds and Approving and Authorizing Other Actions in Respect Thereto

Councilman Tyler, supported by Councilwoman Venecz, moved for passage.

ROLL CALL VOTE (passage)

AYES: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Salinas, Tyler, Emerson, Woerpel, Rakos

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried

9/0/0

ORDINANCE NO. 9658 PASSED

Mayor McDermott- Can I say something about that project also? Like wrapping up projects at the end of the year, if you all remember we did \$5 million out of the ARPA for the Y, and this \$6 million bond wraps up the entire phase 1 of the project, but there is another phase out there. We have to figure out how to get that one done so that's more complicated, but the White family wants to do another \$20 million dollar expansion that will head more towards 165<sup>th</sup> street. We have to do some unlocking of Economic Development projects to make that

*Prepared by  
Robert J. Golec  
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Mayor McDermott cont.- happen, but that's phase 2 and it's sitting there. It's all drawn up, it's just a matter of moving some businesses around and getting that done. Thank you to the Council. Thank you Councilman Barry. Thank you to the Council for approving ARPA and to the TIF money to make that project a reality. I go there a lot and there's hundreds of people there at all times. It's wonderful.

Councilman Woerpel, supported by Councilman Spitale, moved for passage.

Motion carried 9/0/0 ORDINANCE NO. 9659 PASSED

Councilman Woerpel, supported by Councilwoman Alexander, moved for passage.

Motion carried 9/0/0 ORDINANCE NO. 9660 PASSED

Motion Carried 9/0/0 MOTION CARRIED

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INTRODUCTION OF ORDINANCES cont.

- 24-38            An Ordinance Amending Ord. No. 9647, Being an Ordinance Fixing the Salaries and Wages of all City Officials and Employees of the City of Hammond, Indiana, other than those Fixed by Statute or by Ordinance Heretofore Enacted, and Fixing the Effective Date Thereof

Councilman Woerpel, supported by Councilwoman Venecz, moved the proposed ordinance to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> reading by title, with a Council as a Whole committee meeting at 5:15 p.m. on January 13, 2025.

Councilman Woerpel- Like the Mayor stated, when we passed the budget, we were given estimates because contracts weren't done so basically this is an ordinance amending the budget to coincide with the negotiated contracts that are completed as far as Civil City workers and Sanitary District, I'm assuming, all but the Teamsters right? Not the Teamsters, the Public Works?

Mayor McDermott- Yeah.

Councilman Woerpel- Just a quick question, that'll be when they're done, we'll have a separate amendment for that too, correct?

Mayor McDermott- This is 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> so by the time we come back for 3<sup>rd</sup> and final, we should have the final answers on this. I imagine we already know what the answers are on most of the unions. We just have to figure out what's going on with the Teamsters and Public Works. There's a couple other changes we need to make as well. When we come back for 3<sup>rd</sup> and final, like I said, I'll either have good news and we'll wrap all this up, or I'll have real bad news. Hopefully it will be good news. I imagine it will be, we have a good relationship with the Teamsters. If you remember we gave the Teamster drivers in Public Works a mid contract raise. I just want to point that out for the Council. It wasn't in the contract. We were losing drivers so we gave our drivers a mid contract raise as a sign of goodwill, so I imagine that will pay off. I'm hoping that pays off because you know, that's the union that is giving us trouble right now. Thank you Councilman Woerpel, so 2 weeks from now we will have all the answers hopefully.

ROLL CALL VOTE (1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> reading)

AYES: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Salinas, Tyler, Emerson, Woerpel, Rakos

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion Carried

9/0/0

MOTION CARRIED

- 24-39            An Ordinance Amending Ordinance NO. 9648, Being and Ordinance Fixing the Salaries and Wages of all Policeman and Fireman of the City of Hammond, Indiana other than those Fixed by Statute or by Ordinance Heretofore Enacted, and Fixing the Effective Date Thereof

Councilman Woerpel, supported by Councilwoman Alexander, moved the proposed ordinance to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> reading by title, with a Council as a Whole committee meeting at 5:15 p.m. on January 13, 2025.

Councilman Woerpel- Same thing as before, except this pertains to the Police and Fire contracts.

Mayor McDermott- When we were, in December we wanted to pass the Police and Fire salary ordinance

*Prepared by  
Robert J. Golec  
Hammond City Clerk*

INTRODUCTION OF ORDINANCES cont.

Mayor McDermott cont.- properly, and we talked about it at the time. We said we're in the middle of negotiations. We wanna pass this just like the Council did, so we inserted 1 % in there. We knew we were going to have to come back in and amend it. Now that we've completed negotiations, this is us coming back to amend it. For your information, in the 1<sup>st</sup> year, the Police are scheduled to get a 15% pay raise. Fire are scheduled to get a 10% pay raise in the 1<sup>st</sup> year. In the interest of transparency, that's the number. It's a lot bigger than 1. But if you remember, the Police Department was singling, they were discontent with the contract 3 years ago. 1 year into the deal, they were pissed right off the bat and we held 'em off because we knew eventually we were gonna pay the piper. The piper is here. We knew that this was coming. I know that this is a big number, but I know that we've been talking about this for a couple years now. Next year is our year, of course as long as the Council approves it.

ROLL CALL VOTE (1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> reading)

AYES: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Salinas, Tyler, Emerson, Woerpel, Rakos

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion Carried

9/0/0

MOTION CARRIED

RESOLUTIONS

None

NEW AND UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Councilman Woerpel- I owe you an apology. Councilwoman Alexander told me she was the Grinch this year and showed me a picture of herself, so I apologize.

Councilman Tyler- I should have included this under Communications, but at the request of a resident of the 3<sup>rd</sup> district, I did go on record and submit a letter to the Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor in opposition of the 22% NIPSCO rate increase. So I've shared a copy of that letter with Liz to keep on file for our records.

Mayor McDermott- Thank you, Councilman Barry. Can I say something about that?

Council President Rakos- Yes

Mayor McDermott- I appreciate you doing that. It's a lot more difficult for a Mayor to do that, especially when we work with NIPSCO on so many more projects. Obviously it's a big rate increase. I know our residents are talking a lot about it. I appreciate you doing that on behalf of the City.

Councilman Kalwinski- Knights of Columbus will be sponsoring the Pierogi Drop on 119<sup>th</sup> and Atchison Avenue, tomorrow. The doings begin at 8 p.m. There will be heated facilities outside in their parking lot as well as music indoors and outdoors, and fine cuisine as well with the pierogi drop happening at midnight. Also, I wanna thank the Mayor for allowing the Knights to paint on Atchison Avenue, home of the pierogi drop and Hammond and Whiting under that, so that people will know where they're at and when it happens, so thank you from the Knights of Columbus and myself, and we're looking forward to a big turn out. Come out and Brave the

NEW AND UNFINISHED BUSINESS cont.

Councilman Kalwinski cont.- weather and have a good time with music, food, and drink. Thank you.

Councilwoman Alexander- As we go into the new year, I just want to remind everyone to not shoot guns up in the air during this time. We know that it is a festive time, but shooting guns, the bullets have to come down, so we do not want any issues this season. I do want to wish everyone a Happy New Year as we go into the holiday in the next couple days.

Mayor McDermott- I was just reading in the paper that a resident of Cal City went down, he didn't pass away but he got hit with a falling bullet just the other day in Cal City. That could have been fired from anywhere. I appreciate you Councilwoman for bringing that up. Every year people celebrate by firing guns into the air, and this is the first year that Hammond has Shot Spotter. We're suing people when we can prove that gunfire has happened at your house. We're filing lawsuits against them and receiving judgements. We have Shot Spotter that will put our cops right where they need to be if gunfire is happening tomorrow night to celebrate the new year. Thank you, Councilwoman, for bringing that up. Happy New Year everybody, it's nice to see you all.

Councilwoman Venecz- Happy New Year to you, Mayor, and everyone else.

PUBLIC EXPRESSION

John Haluska- I want to talk to you about the City taking the property that my family operates. I want to ask the Council to reconsider taking the property by imminent domain. It's actually 2 parcels of property. My thought is instead of taking all of the property by imminent domain to provide a restaurant for District 4, possibly just take the property to the east for the restaurant and leave the building for my family to still operate. The 4<sup>th</sup> district gets it's restaurant, my family gets to keep it's business and everyone is happy. I have also talked to an investor who is willing to put a Hilton Hotel, and a sit down restaurant and lounge, and a banquet all that holds 300 people. That's private money and won't cost the city anything. There's a court date January 7<sup>th</sup>, and I'm asking for a continuance to discuss these details.

Erin Tyler- We felt compelled to come up here and say thank you to all of you. We get to see a little bit with Councilman Tyler being my husband of just what you guys all do. When I think about just the individual calls that you get from residents and them just feeling heard, even though you're not always able to address what they're calling about. I just think it's very meaningful. I used to come to every meeting, but now we just watch. They wanted to say, thank you for helping the city and taking care of our city. So thank you for that. I also just wanted to say a quick thank you to everyone that comes to speak during public expression. I just think any time that citizens are actually getting involved and coming to speak, If it feels disheartening, just know that I'm having talks with my kids about the environment because of what you all are doing. Thank you everyone, I hope you have a good new year.

George Stoya- I was under the impression there was gonna be a public hearing on this resolution, at least that's what it says in the newspaper on the economic revitalization area on December 30<sup>th</sup>. Maybe I missed it, jokes on me. I understand that this thing has already been signed off and passed. I don't know what's going on here. My concern about the data center, I have an article here, and it profiles how much the extent of how much the state of Indiana has already conferred it's blessing on these types of projects. I'm sure the Mayor is prevailing it upon you guys to give them everything but the kitchen sink. The problem is they're gonna draw down real big on

*Prepared by  
Robert J. Golec  
Hammond City Clerk*

## PUBLIC EXPRESSION cont.

George Stoya cont.- electricity. We've upped the fees here tonight, that I don't know about either, none of this stuff is even in the agenda. Nobody knows what the hell is going on around here, just you guys. I don't understand the way you guys are running this government here. We're the last to know, after we get hit with it. Thanks a lot. So much for being our representatives right? The point is, I'm a little angry about it. This is not the way to run a City Hall. Nobody knows what you guys are doing. When NIPSCO is going around, they're still going to cash in and jack up the rates because it needs more capacity. Guess who's gonna pay for that? We are. I don't see why the digital people at the very least be made to set aside a rainy day fund for destitute people when the rates get too high on the electricity. I know the Citizens group out of Indy managed to squeeze money out of Meta and Amazon to help destitute people. I really don't like the way you guys are doing things at all.

Joey Hinds- I would like to ask for a moment of silence for both sides of the conflict in Gaza. I think we're all aware of what's going on out there. In the season of Christmas and the new year, as we reflect on peace and renewal, let us remember the human cost of division and violence. Let us recommit ourselves to fostering and understanding compassion and cooperation. For 4 years, we've stood before this council speaking up for Briar East Woods, a natural space that embodies communities history to health and resilience. This forest is home to 100 year old oaks, majestic maples, and ecosystems that sustained local wildlife immitigating flooding. These trees do more than stand. They work for us everyday by improving our air quality. Decisions to develop this space can happen too quickly with too little community input. I urge the council to consider a tree protection ordinance or the establishment of a tree board. A tree ordinance could protect heritage trees based on size, age or ecological value, require permits for tree removal for transparent review process, mandate replanting or conservation offsets if removal is unavoidable. A tree board could serve as an advisory group insuring that local expertise and resident voices guide decisions about our urban forest. This board could also educate the public and develop long term plans for preserving spaces like Briar East Woods. Other cities have successfully implemented tree advisory boards, and I firmly believe our city could do the same. This is not just about saving trees. It's about leaving a legacy. I'd like us to work together.

TJ Gaertig- I hope you guys had a good holiday. I'd like to echo what the kids said, thank you for taking care of our city. Thank you guys for putting in the work and hearing us out. I appreciate it. First I wanted to comment about the Haluska's haunted house. Everyone that I've talked to about it, thinks it's cool that Hammond has a haunted house. I think it's a cool historic building. 105 years old and it was the Indiana Botanic Garden's largest and oldest herbal distribution center. It's a historic building, it's a cool building. I think he had a good idea, it's already 2 parcels. I think there's room for a compromise there, and I think we should keep it around. I also wanted to talk about Briar East Woods and Governor's Parkway. I heard some talk at the last meeting that people are saying this is a state project run by INDOT, and Hammond has no control over it, and that's not true. It is a state project but Hammond definitely has control over it. First off, it was designed by our City Engineer, Dean Button. He was on the design team with INDOT the entire way through. He was even on the slide show at the public hearing where they presented it all to us. Hammond applied for the grant funding through the tracks program. The federal government still has yet to approve Governor's Parkway due to the many problems raised by the residents of Hammond. The FRA representative, Tina Bloomenburg said it is always up to local communities if they want to go through with a project. She also said that there is plenty of funding available and Hammond is a priority. Why is Hammond a priority? I think we all remember when Hammond made national news because last year when the kids were climbing over parked trains to get to school. It has been abundantly clear that this does nothing for those kids walking to school. The Mayor said so himself at Mayor's Night Out in 2023 in the 6<sup>th</sup> District. We talked about a pedestrian overpass, we have now lost that funding from the railroad.

*Prepared by  
Robert J. Golec  
Hammond City Clerk*

PUBLIC EXPRESSION cont.

Casey King- I've read a lot about Mr. Haluska's property, so I'd like to give you a little history lesson, which TJ already did. That property was built by Joseph Myer in the 1900's. He settled here in Northwest Indiana because this environment is one of the richest environments in the entire world with biodiversity. He established the world's largest supplier of natural medicine at the time. I purchased his 1933 catalog last year on ebay. He would publish that every year and you could mail order medicine. That building is where he distributed that natural medicine. We value your property, and you should as well. I would suggest going to the Hammond Historical Preservation Committee and expressing your concerns there as well. To tie that in with Briar East Woods, Briar East Woods is the last remnant of biodiverse land in the City of Hammond. It's 4,700 estimated years old. That land is an example of why he settled here. It's rich, it's biodiverse, there's animals. We have a list of plant life from Sandy O'BRIEN who is a biologist showing the plants that are in the woods. The Briar East Woods is the greatest pollution remediator. The fact that the Mayor came up here and spoke about BP, and some of you Council members support the destruction of these woods, it's completely contradictory. If you're gonna talk about pollution, do not destroy the greatest pollution buffer your city has. The SCA plants trees, and Mr. Rakos, you said you support that organization, The SCA plants trees specifically to be pollution buffers. Over the summer we planted over 70 trees between markstown and BP. No amount of trees will replace the trees from Briar East Woods. Please read the article that was published last week in The Sun Times about Briar East Woods, it's 2 pages, please read it.

Ken Rosek- Happy New Year. I was going back and forth as far as what I was going to talk about tonight, and I guess I kinda centered in on when the Mayor was talking about the BP incident, and I've gone through there various times when it smelled really bad, but just like Casey said, this is nature versus industry around here. You need to hold on to what nature we have in order to balance out the industry. To completely wipe out thousands of trees, 35 acres of dune woodlands when you've got oil tank farms and expressways and all this other stuff dividing us up, it makes no sense to me whatsoever. I don't think it makes much sense to most of you, to be honest. I think you've been pressured into this, and I feel for you in that way, but we're not going to let up. It's a dumb idea. We've got a better alternative that solves all of the problems for less money and doesn't destroy all the woods. It services the schools, and the teachers, and the parents dropping off students, and the emergency vehicles. It offers a second alternative route. It doesn't close the fastest route. It will increase emergency time. Mayor talked about getting no information from BP, well he came out last week, and he looked at all of us and told us he was gonna take down every single building on Kennedy Avenue, he boasted about it. He was very clear, he seemed serious. We know that he exaggerates sometimes, but is that good for our neighborhood? It was never talked about or explained. What was the point of him telling everybody that? I don't get it. It's not good for business. Who would want to move their business into our area knowing that a building could be taken out right out from under them? Which is happening.

Grace Tafolla- I live in Gary. I'm a Purdue student and come through the area a lot. Over the years, I have been planting trees with SCA, but those are young trees and they do not give us the kind of environmental help or buffer as the trees that have been here forever are giving us. It'll be 20-30 years before they produce nearly as much oxygen as the trees in Briar East Woods are producing. I'm extremely tired of coming here. I'm sure you're tired of listening to us constantly come up here and tell you how to do your job, but apparently it's what we have to do to make our city the way all of us want it to be. We want trees in our city, and not young trees, we want old trees, trees that have been here since before our time. We want to remember what the earth looked like before it was filled with humans. They're everywhere. I just want to see a little actual nature. The Indiana Dunes in Miller, brought in over \$400 million in revenue. It's a lot bigger than Hessville Dunes, but Hessville Dunes is

*Prepared by  
Robert J. Golec  
Hammond City Clerk*

PUBLIC EXPRESSION cont.

Grace Tafolla cont.- 12 acres that provide you with beautiful old woodland teeming with life, nothing compared to the dead soil within the rest of your city. It is dead. There's no life, it's dead, nothing living other than us. It's depressing to see quite frankly. I just am here to tell you to care about it. In East Chicago, where I was planting 50 trees, there used to be tons of old growth trees blocking the ugliness of BP. My coworker told us she joined SCA because she heard about the trees being planted in Marktown by them because she has grown up there all her life and all the trees she used to talk to as a child and would play around are gone now. BP bought the properties, they cleared them out, and turned them into power stations to help fund their refinery and it looks horrible. This isn't a place I want to live anymore. I want to leave here as fast as I can because this is industrial wasteland and the Hessville Dunes is the very last part of it that you have the option to protect to prevent from becoming an industrial wasteland.

Councilwoman Alexander, supported by Councilman Tyler, moved to Adjourn

AYES: ALL

2024 HAMMOND COMMON COUNCIL ATTENDANCE RECORD OF  
ELECTRONIC AND PHYSICAL PRESENCE

	Jan		Feb		Mar		Apr		May		Jun		Jul		Aug		Sep		Oct		Nov		Dec	
	8	22	12	26	11	25	8	22	13	28	10	24	8	22	12	26	9	23	15	28	13	25	9	30
Katrina Alexander	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	P	P	E	E	A	P	P	P	P
Dan Spitale	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Janet Venecz	E	P	P	P	P	P	A	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Mark Kalwinski	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	A	P	P	P	P	P	P	A	P	P	P	P	P
Alfonso Salinas III	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	E
Barry Tyler	P	P	P	E	P	E	P	P	P	P	P	E	P	E	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Bill Emerson	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	A	P	P	P
Dave Woerpel	A	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Scott Rakos	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Initials	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG	RJG

E=ELECTRONIC

P=PHYSICALLY

PRESENT

A=ABSENT

If the member qualifies for an exemption from the "Consecutive - 50" requirements, draw a circle around the E for that meeting/ member.


ATTEST:



Robert J. Golec, City Clerk

Time: 7:12 p.m.  
mg/cb

*Prepared by*  
**Robert J. Golec**  
**Hammond City Clerk**

  
 Dave Woerpel, President  
 Hammond Common Council