

The regular meeting of the Hammond Common Council of the City of Hammond, Lake County, Indiana was held on April 13, 2020 in the Hammond City Council Chambers.

Council President Dave Woerpel presided.

Council Coordinator Carmen Balboa facilitated.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was recited by all.

Moment of Silence was observed.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Tyler, Rakos, Woerpel

ABSENT: Kalwinski, Torres, Emerson

TOTAL: 6

MAYOR'S ADDRESS

Mayor McDermott- I want to congratulate the Council, and thank Hammond's I.T. Department for making this happen. Hammond is 135 year old City and I guarantee you this is the first virtual meeting our City has ever had. I know a lot of people worked hard to get this done. I want to congratulate the I.T. Department and the City Council. I think is pretty groundbreaking... quite frankly when this is all said and done we will probably have a lot more of this type of meeting. Maybe if a certain council member can't be there they can Zoom in, who knows what the future holds. I just wanted to make myself available to the Council if anyone wanted to talk about Finances, obviously about 3 to 4 weeks ago I put in an Executive Order that froze the Gaming Budget. Since that time we have seen the Horseshoe Casino get shut down with no hard reopening date. We also know, and rightfully so, that Gov. Holcomb delayed everyone's Property Tax Payments for two months. Normally they pay in May, now it will be July, which is going to provide for fewer tax revenues than we're anticipating for the City. So, obviously, we have challenges maintaining the staffing levels, and... which that is the most important part. But more importantly we didn't want to put ourselves in a hole, and I would like to thank the Council for supporting me with this freeze of the Gaming Revenues until we know what's going on. And that's had a big impact on the District Councilmen, and I want to recognize that and thank the District Councilmen for being patient during this time. Normally we're designing projects right now, and starting construction projects, and obviously that's not happening in 2020, unless the money has already been appropriated. So, I want to tell the Council I recognize what you've allowed me to do, I think it's in Hammond's best interest. So, we do have two challenges looming right now. We have about well over half of our workforce is working from home right now other than Fire, Police, Public Works, are pretty much working as normal. There are skeleton staff in the Hammond Sanitary District, Water Dept, Port Authority, and Housing Authority. We're all working from home as much as possible. But anyway, January and February were normal months for the Horseshoe Casino. They actually had good months in January and February then it just fell off. So, until we know what's going on it's going to be pretty tough to commit to anything as far as gaming expenditures until we know what the situation with Property Tax Revenue, and what the Horseshoe is making. We anticipated Horseshoe making over \$30 million dollars this year for us which is what they normally do in an average year, that isn't happening this year. And as a result we're gonna have to adjust the way we do business. Because this is the new normal. I haven't talked to Horseshoe lately, but I would say hopefully they're up and running by July 1st, that's worse case scenario, even if it opens July 1st, I don't anticipate them making the type of revenue they made in January and

*Prepared by
Robert J. Golec
Hammond City Clerk*

February. We have to assume the worst. I think it's the safest thing we all can do is assume the worst, and make

MAYOR'S ADDRESS cont.

Mayor McDermott cont. - sure we're covering our basics so we won't have to furlough our employees, or lay off our employees. That's where I'm coming from. I just wanted to make sure that I made myself available for the Council on today. So I thank President Woerpel for letting me speak. I don't know if anyone has any questions?

Council President Woerpel- Carmen, let the record show that Council Emerson and Councilman Kalwinski have joined. It's now 8 Present and 1 Absent. Does anyone have questions for the Mayor?

Council President Woerpel- It's my understanding that the tax draws have been set back. The early tax draw we get will be like if you have your money in escrow... can you explain a little bit? Will there be 3 payments this year, and how does this affect our payroll?

Mayor McDermott- It will affect it traumatically, we anticipated 94% of Hammond Residents paying Property Tax in May as usual. Not only do Hoosier tax payers not have to file in May, they can file in July, which means we can't draw from it until August, and our Budget assumed, rightfully so, 94% payment. Quite frankly, we can be nowhere near that when we actually get our money in August. Because of the looming recession and because a lot of people can't afford it right now. The fact is it's a perfect storm, between the Gaming Boats being shut down, Property taxes are delayed and a lot of companies and households in the United States. We have to cope with the new normal and this is the new normal, which is our property taxes being delayed and our Gaming Revenue may not be coming in nowhere near what we're used to since I been mayor 16 years. So, we have to adjust to that and if we don't, if we make mistakes as I've made in the past as Mayor, and spend money assuming things will get normal, we can find ourselves upside down. I can't do that as Mayor, that's why I appreciate the Council's support when asked to freeze the Gaming Revenue. I think it was smart what we did until we know what the financial situation is, stick to this. I'm also sticking to this Council not spending any gaming money. When we get a better picture of where we're going then we can start talking about projects again.

Councilwoman Alexander- Do we know how much PPE our first responders have and if we have enough for them?

Mayor McDermott- We can always use more, and I appreciate you bringing that up. We have been getting a lot of donations from Unions and Businesses. And we've been asking people that want to donate PPE to Hammond's First Responders, Police, Fire and Garbage men. These people are on the front lines and I just wanted to point that out when we talk about Police and Fire, we talk about Garbage men there on the front line as well. We can always use more, if anyone is listening and wants to donate call my Office or the Council chamber. We ask people to drop off at the Central Fire Station as well.

Councilwoman Alexander- How many people in the City of Hammond have been infected with COVID- 19?

Mayor McDermott- I can tell you safely there are over forty (40) residents. That's what we know for sure in reality there can be 100s more that are symptomatic. The scary thing is we've only done 36,000 in Indiana, and

MAYOR'S ADDRESS cont.

Mayor McDermott cont. - you look over in Illinois, they did over 7,000 test in 24 hrs. We're averaging 1/3 of that. And we just found out that a Hammond Fire Fighter tested positive, and the Hammond Cop who tested positive, he's actually getting ready to return to work. We also have a Public Works employee who is also positive, I think that's all we have at this point, and hopefully we don't get anymore.

Councilwoman Alexander- Thank you for that update. I just want to make sure the people are hearing that so that they can know why it's important to stay home and stay safe.

Council President Woerpel- We have a Public Hearing tonight and I would ask the public that's watching if they want to participate in the Public Hearing to go to ZoomUS and punch in meeting ID # 291706910. And we do have the Public Hearing we will ask if there is anyone that wants to speak. Also we are taking any questions or comments by email for 7 days on the Public Hearing on the Ordinance tonight to appropriate monies into the 2020 Gaming Fund.

Mayor McDermott- Can I make one thing clear? I misspoke that number sixty (60) one of the commenters pointed out I was going off the top of my head. Sixty (60) confirmed cases in Hammond.

READING OF THE MINUTES

Councilwoman Alexander, supported by Councilman Spitale, moved to accept the minutes of March 23, 2020 and place on file.

Councilwoman Alexander, supported by Councilwoman Venecz, moved to amend the minutes to read President Woerpel presided and place on file.

ROLL CALL VOTE (amend minutes)

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: Torres

Motion carried

8/0/1

MOTION CARRIED

Council President Woerpel - On accepting the amended minutes, all in favor? All opposed?

AYES: ALL

APPROVAL OF CLAIMS

Councilman Rakos, supported by Councilwoman Venecz, moved to approve the claims from March 18, 2020 through April 8, 2020. Claim #1668 through Claim #1903, inclusive.

Councilman Torres joins the meeting.

ROLL CALL VOTE (claims)

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried

9/0/0

CLAIMS APPROVED

I.T. Director, Chris Campbell - I would just like to clarify that the URL is Zoom.us meeting ID # is 291706910

PUBLIC HEARINGS

20-07 An Ordinance to Appropriate Monies into the 2020 Gaming Fund

Council President Woerpel- Anyone wishing to be heard on this Ordinance can send an Email to Council@gohammond.com as long as it's received in 7 days it will be added to the minutes of next meeting.

COMMUNICATIONS

Council President Woerpel- I received a cute letter from Ashley Rojo, 3rd grade, of Hess Elementary School that is addressed to myself but it is to the whole entire Council. Obviously, this was when school was still in because she wanted us to respond to questions like, what's an ordinance? What does a Councilman do with the money? What does it take to approve the money?

Mayor McDermott - In the 2nd District I heard about a sink hole that was forming on Chicago Avenue, sort of right by Bishop Noll, just west of Bishop Noll right as soon as you come off of the Toll Road. There was a contractor for the Toll Road that nicked one of our Sanitary lines. It's leaking and taking in sand which is causing a huge sink hole on Chicago Avenue. Which is probably gonna result in at least the shut down of three out of the four lanes, if not, the entire street. Councilman Torres, I know you are probably going to start to get asked questions about it. I just wanted to let you know I was out there today and it's not a good situation at all. It's not the fault of any city of Hammond employee or any city of Hammond contractor. It was the Toll Road contractor that did it and I don't know how long it's gonna be shut down for. Sanitary District is assessing the damage today. So I just wanted Councilman Torres, Councilman Kalwinski and the At Larges to know. I imagine Chicago Avenue will be at least 75% shut down if not completely.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Finance Committee - Councilman Woerpel - I would like to enter as a Committee Report the Finance Committee statement that was made about the finances. Is there anyone that is here now that didn't hear it and would like him to repeat it? Does anyone want to hear from the Mayor again on an issue? Councilman Emerson or Councilman Torres, were you here when he made the statement? Any questions?

Councilman Emerson - Well, I'd like a closing date but I know that's probably not possible because it's unpredictable.

Mayor McDermott - A closing date?

Councilman Emerson - Well, a date when we might assume working on projects that are not already signed for?

Mayor McDermott - Right. Well, the first thing I think we need to do is figure out how much gaming revenue we are going to get this year. I'm gonna assume January and February we made \$5 million, okay. After that, I can tell, through June, it's gonna be close to nothing. To say that by July 1st the boats will be up and running and doing well again, I think it's hard to tell. Maybe they'll get 80% of where they were, who knows? But, right now they're just shut. There's not a customer there. Not only that, we're not going to be drawing our property tax revenue until August and what percentage of that draw are we actually getting in August? If it's down to 50% or 60%. We've got to start prioritizing. We've never suffered mass layoffs in the city of Hammond. We've never furloughed our employees. I hope that that streak continues. But these are discussions that we are going to have to have eventually, but I know I'd rather just hunker down and get through this, you know, hopefully 2021 will be a better year.

Councilman Torres - I have over \$500 thousand dollars of unspent money from last year. It should have been spent in 2019. That shouldn't be part of this new money for 2020.

Mayor McDermott - I understand what you're saying.

Councilman Torres - Okay, and I have some unfinished projects I can put that on. In fact it's \$554, whatever it is. I don't have the exact figures in front of me right now. But better than a half a million dollars. I would like to be able to spend that this year because it's unspent money from last year.

Council President Woerpel - That's according to the ordinance we have in front of us, and I think we all have remaining gaming funds. But I just want to be clear, I feel that, and this is just my opinion, that my number one priority is for the city. Then we can do what we got to do after, I don't know how it affects the money we are transferring over from what was left over from 2019 to 2020, but does anybody have anything to add to that?

Councilman Torres - 2nd District and the 3rd District have the most money to spend. You have around \$20 thousand. Again, I don't have the figures. But anyways, it's a whole lot different than the amount I have. You and the 6th District have the least unspent money. If I had that amount, you know, I would be willing to sacrifice it too. I have a lot of undone projects in my district. I would like to use that money, if I can, to use it for projects.

COMMITTEE REPORTS cont.

Mayor McDermott - Councilman Torres, I appreciate your advise. I think that's a valid statement you brought up. We're not looking to go backwards, obviously, we're talking about 2020 money. Whether or not we get the 2020 money. I think you have a valid point, but we have to talk through these issues. I understand what you're saying. By the way, I have rollover money too from by the Mayor's Office and we're not spending anything at all. I'm saving it for the budget. I'm making sure that we can make payroll. Because from where I'm coming from, I know where you're coming from if you have rollover money, I'm hearing you. I appreciate it.

Community and Crime Watch Committee - Councilwoman Venecz - No upcoming meetings but we ask that everyone remain vigilant. Practice the social distancing, wear masks and gloves if you have to go to the store. Just be safe.

Council President Woerpel - Mayor, could you address how the city is handling the kids in the parks not adhering to the rules. I mean we're not throwing anyone in jail or anything.

Mayor McDermott - We've had one citation issued since this lock down started. I believe that's a true statement. It was a high profile one. It was the church that was holding a service last weekend. It was the only citation, I believe, that was issued for violating the Governor's orders. We don't want to issue citations. We shouldn't even have these conversations. There are still kids going to the skate board park there's still kids busting through the tape to skateboard, to go on the playgrounds. We see kids on the basketball courts. Listen, I feel bad for the kids. I feel bad for the parents who can't go to work, but until we flatten the curve we've got to play this game and Hammond Police are out there enforcing the Governor's Order. The Parks are closed. Park buildings are closed. City Hall is closed to outside. We are still working but you can't get in to City Hall. That's the biggest problem we're having, Councilman Woerpel. Parental control over the kids.

ORDINANCE 3RD READING - FINAL PASSAGE

20-07 An Ordinance to Appropriate monies into the 2020 Gaming Fund

Councilman Kalwinski - Can we pass this when the Public Hearing is allowed to respond for the next seven days?

Council President Woerpel - Atty. Berger, did you hear the question? He must not be hearing us. I know we've had public hearings after things were passed. It's the Council's pleasure. This is the Gaming money that Councilman Torres spoke of earlier and would you like to just bring it out at the next meeting?

Councilman Kalwinski - I'm not sure how we can go ahead with passing it today and then say that public hearing is... that we really listened to people and negate anything they have to say by passing it today, if they want to make a comment after today. So I say that my recommendation is that we wait. We can't spend it right now anyways.

Council President Woerpel - Is that fine with everybody else?

ORDINANCE 3RD READING - FINAL PASSAGE cont.

Councilman Torres - I agree, we ought to table that until we hear from the public on this.

Councilman Kalwinski, supported by Councilman Torres, moved to table 20-07.

ROLL CALL VOTE (table 20-07)

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried

9/0/0

MOTION TO TABLE PASSED

INTRODUCTION OF ORDINANCES

None

RESOLUTIONS

None

NEW AND UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Councilman Kalwinski - I listened earlier to comments by Councilman Torres. I agree too, I would like to be able to use my 2019 money for the projects that were supposed to go last year. But, in a bigger picture, about thirteen years or so myself, Dan Repay, Joann Matonovich, when they were on the Council, we all tried to create an ordinance to pass pertaining to a Rainy Day Fund using casino dollars to bank away for the future and couldn't get really any traction from the rest of the Council or the Administration to pass that at the time. But, in retrospect, and hindsight is 20/20, that Rainy Day Fund sure would have come in handy right now.

Mayor McDermott - Hate to burst your bubble, Councilman, we have a Rainy Day Fund.

Councilman Kalwinski - How much is it?

Mayor McDermott - I couldn't tell you off the top of my head. A couple million dollars at least.

Councilman Kalwinski - We were looking for an ordinance that would create something like \$20 million in ten years. Okay.

Mayor McDermott - You should have floated that ordinance.

Councilman Kalwinski - We did float it.

Councilman Torres - I just want for the record that I came on about 6:14 p.m. I had trouble connecting.

Council President Woerpel - I would entertain motions to re-appoint Richard Spitale to the Building Contractor's Board. It's a two year term that expires on April 25th. The Electrical Board is Ron Lubas for two

NEW AND UNFINISHED BUSINESS cont.

Council President Woerpel cont. - years, his term expires April 25th of this year and Jorge Bautista is a one year term that expires on April 25th of this year and the HVAC Contractors Board, Ron Kotso, is up on April 25th of this year and that's a two year term. So I would entertain a motion to do them separately or as a group.

Councilman Rakos, supported by Councilman Spitale, moved to make the appointments listed by the Council President.

Councilman Tyler - Are we sure that all these appointments want to be re-appointed?

Council President Woerpel - The only one I'm not sure about is Mr. Bautista. Has anybody heard anything on this?

ROLL CALL VOTE (appointments)

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried

9/0/0

MOTION CARRIED

Mayor McDermott - We have \$6.3 million in our Rainy Day Fund. We used the Rainy Day Fund to help us with our Energy Efficiency Program. It was created in the budget last year. Actually it was created when we did the Energy Efficiency Program.

Councilman Kalwinski - So we can actually tap into that for ...

Mayor McDermott - We could tap into it, we created it so that we could tap into it to help with our lease payments.

Councilman Kalwinski - But we couldn't use it for anything that we're gonna be short on because of circumstances right now.

PUBLIC EXPRESSION

None

Councilwoman Venecz, supported by Councilman Spitale, moved to adjourn.

AYES: ALL

Dave Woerpel, President
Hammond Common Council

ATTEST:

Robert J. Golec, City Clerk

Time: 6:40 p.m.
dw/cb

*Prepared by
Robert J. Golec
Hammond City Clerk*